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GENERAL EDITOR
Dr. V. A. DEVASENAPATHI

CHRISTIANITY AND TAMIL CULTURE

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AND
TAMIL CULTURE

BY

IGNATIUS HIRUDAYAM

The Dr. S. Radhakrishnan Institute
for Advanced Study in Philosophy

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FOREWORD

The Department of Philosophy was started in the University of Madras in September 1927. In August 1964 it was raised to the status of a Centre for Advanced Study in Philosophy by the University Grants Commission. From 1976 it has come to be known as The Dr S. Radhakrishnan Institute for Advanced Study in Philosophy.

Since its inception in 1927, this Department has kept in view two major objectives: (1) the study of Indian systems of thought and (2) the study of other systems of thought. Last year the Department arranged for a course of special lectures in furtherance of these objectives.

Father Ignatius Hirudayam, S. J., is the Director of Inter-Faith Research and Dialogue Centre, an Institute for inculturation and Tamil Culture. He has been evincing keen interest in the activities of our Institute and has taken part in some of our All India Seminars. He accepted our invitation to deliver three lectures at our Institute on *Christianity and Tamil Culture.*

As part of the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the Department, the special lectures delivered at this Institute are brought out as Golden Jubilee Publications. The Institute is grateful to Fr Ignatius Hirudayam for permission to publish his lectures in the Golden Jubilee Series.

The Institute wishes to thank the Government of Tamil Nadu, Dr Malcolm Ṣ. Adiseshiah, the Vice-Chancellor, and the other authorities of the University of Madras for the financial aid

given for these publications. The Institute is appreciative of the interest evinced by the University Grants Commission in upgrading the parent department into a Centre for Advanced Study in Philosophy, financing it for ten years and its subsequent and sustained interest in the progress of the Institute.

The Institute is grateful to the late Professor S. S. Suryanarayana Sastri for laying the foundations of the Department on sound lines and to Dr. T. M. P. Mahadevan, former Director of the Institute, for building up the Department over a period of three and a half decades by his devoted services.

The General Editor wishes to thank the Rathnam Press for the prompt and neat execution of the work.

V. A. DEVASENAPATHI

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Lecture I

CHRIST TO TAMIL AND TAMIL TO CHRIST

I have been asked to speak on the contribution of Christianity to Tamil and the return contribution of Tamil to Christianity. I shall ask the obvious questions : What is Tamil culture ? What is Christianity ? What can these two contribute to each other ? What have they so far contributed to each other? And finally, what can they contribute to each other in the future ?

Tamil Culture

Cultural anthropologists tell us that the Tamil race like the Indian race was originally an amalgam of all the world races, namely the Europoid, the Negroid and the Mongoloid,[1] theories about the place of their origin notwithstanding. Similarly, whatever be the place of origin of the Dravidians, it is certain that they appear as a distinct cultural stratum around 3000 B C., having mixed with the ancient dwellers of the land, and that they had trade connections with Sumeria and China even before the pre–Vedic Aryans entered India (the Todas of Nilgris are said to be ethnically related with the Sumerians). When the nomadic Vedic Aryans were still in the Indus region about the time of Moses, these South Indians were sending ivory and muslin to the Pharaohs of Egypt. Later, when the Aryans had not yet penetrated to the South, the Tamilians were exporting pearls, precious stones and peacocks to the court of Solomon. But theirs was not a homogeneous civilization. By the side of the highly urbanized, sophisticated trading communities, there lived mesolithic, neolithic and megalithic folks. We have relics of their way of

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1. Anthropology in India, by L. A. Krishna Iyer and L. K. Bala Ratnam, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan Publ.; The Aboriginal Races of India, by S. S. Sarkar, Bookland Publ., Calcutta ; Races and Cultures of India, by D. N. Mazumdar, Asia Publ.; Cultural Anthropology, by Nirmal Kumar Bose, Asia Publ.

life, death and burials all over Tamil Nadu. This pluralistic culture involved the coexistence of several types of faith and cult of various deities, rising or falling with the rise or fall of their tribes.

When the Aryans who had by now spread all over the Gangetic plain, built up kingdoms, fought wars and composed legends about them and had compiled a corpus of Vedic literature, began to penetrate into Tamil Nadu peacefully they found highly civilized Greek and Roman suburban trading settlements near the ports or capital cities of Tamil Nadu. Arnold Toynbee could assert that the "basic Greek in which the new Testament was written in the first century of the Christian era was spoken and understood from Travancore to the hinterland of Marseilles." We remember that the Travancore he speaks of was the Tamil speaking Chera kingdom of those days. Hence there is no doubt about the possibility of the first Apostolic messengers of Christianity coming to Tamil Nadu.

Christian Presence

There is no difference of opinion among historians about the antiquity of the Christian community in Travancore. But on the question of the origin of this community there are at least three different theories. Some authors asserted that this community was planted here towards the latter half of the fourth century by a Syrian merchant named Thomas of Cana; others hold that the community owes its origin to Nestorian missionaries from Persia in the fifth century. While the popular theory maintains that St. Thomas the Apostle of Christ landed in Malabar and converted a few families of Nambudiris some of whom he ordained as priests.[2] Thiru. Ka Naa Subramanyam remarks[3]: "Speculatively it will be wonderful to reconstruct a meeting of the Tamil Saint

2. Cf. Tamilian Antiquary Vol. II, No. 2, 1913, p. 69 fol. by Joseph C. Panjikaran; p. 73 gives a number of Syrian Christian customs similar to those of the Nambudiris; St. Thomas in South India, by Fr. Placid T. O. C. D.

3. The Catholic Community in India, by Ka Naa Subramanyam.

of Mylapore, Thiruvalluvar and St. Thomas of the Christians...As a novelist I feel that this meeting of the two saints has great fictional possibilities and I might yet try my hand at writing this novel". We do not know if Ka. Naa. is trying his hand at it or not. But some, other than novelists, have claimed for it more than fictional possibilities.

The Kural and Christianity

"It is often urged and with considerable force," wrote Dr. J. Lazarus, "that at least for the purer moral sentiments of the Kural the poet (Thiruvalluvar) is indebted to Christianity. 'We may fairly picture him' writes Dr. Pope the latest advocate of this theory, 'walking along the sea-shore with the Christian teachers, and imbibing Christian ideas, tinged with the peculiarities of the Alexandrian school and day by day working them into his own *Kural*'. But the *Kural*," continues Dr. Lazarus, "betrays no traces of distinctively Christian ideas or ethics such as may be ascribed to Christ or His Apostles alone. None of the ten epithets by which the Deity is described in the opening chapter of the *Kural* has the remotest connection with Christ or God, that is to say, as they are designated in the Bible. The chapter on killing deals exclusively with the literal taking away of life. That on love is quite different from the Apostle's eulogium in I Corinthians, Chapter 13. Of course here and there are similarities of expression, nay even identical moral sentiments, but this is quite natural; for human nature is the same everywhere, and even oceans cannot separate kindred souls or moral instincts. Of one thing, however, we may be certain. In his daily intercourse with the Christians of Mylapore, which is quite probable, the poet must have observed the superior sanctity and attractiveness of the Christian home which may have contributed in *no* small degree to the beautiful picture he has given us of a Tamil family."[4]

4. The Kural, by the Rev. Dr. J. Lazarus: The Tamilian Antiquary, Vol. II, No. 1. Edited by Pandit J. Savariroyan, Hony. Secretary, T. A. Society, Trichinopoly 1913, pp. 59-60. Similar surmises were made about the Bhagavad Gita and other Indian works in the Indian Antiquary e.g. Vol. II, 1873, Oct. pp. 283-295. And the question stands just there.

The probability Dr. Lazarus conceded may perhaps apply to some of the Protestant homes which had a millenium and a half to come, but not to the Christian Catholic homesteads which too were problematic.

The Greeks and Romans melted away as they had come, but the Aryans stayed, mingled with the pre-Aryan racial blend and became sons of the soil. Tamil and Sanskrit underwent mutual assimilation. Religious beliefs, rudimentary philosophies of life and salvation of the tribes in Tamil Nadu found integration. While the Aryans domineered in certain areas of life, the pre–Vedic traditions and Agamic forms of worship and temple–centred spiritual life asserted themselves all over the country.

Values of Tamil Culture

About the same time when the Eternal Galilean was sending forth his Apostles to the four corners of the world to spread his message, the Spirit of His Father who "with a marvellous providence directs the unfolding of time,"[5] whose grace works in an unseen way in all men of good will, whose revealing voice in the discourse of creatures has been heard by "all believers of whatever religion"[6] was inspiring the Tamil bards with an evangelical style of writing idylls called Aaṛṛupadai, which consisted essentially in announcing the good things one has received to those who are in search for them, and pointing out to them the way.[7] This became in fact the motto of Tamil culture: Yām peṛṛa inbam peṛuga iv vaiyakam (May the wide world share in the happiness that has been granted to us). Sharing with others anything of truth, goodness, beauty or happiness which one has found was a cultural and religious urge of the Tamils. Thirumurugaṛṛupadai is the ancient idyll where a mystic poet who has experienced the

5. Vatican II: Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, No. 26.

6. *Ibid.* Nos. 22 & 36.

7. " கூத்தரும் பாணரும் பொருநரும் விறலியும்
ஆற்றிடைக் காட்சி உறழத் தோன்றி
பெற்ற பெருவளம் பெறாஅர்க்கு அறிவுறீஇச்
சென்று பயனெதிரச் சொன்ன பக்கமும்" —(தொல்காப்பியம்)

grace of god Murugan announces the news and points the way to a god–seeker. If St. Thomas the Apostle did come announcing how he had experienced God in a wandering Rabbi from Nazareth, the rishis, seers, yogis, bikshus and Gaundi Adigals of Tamil Nadu would have shared their experiences with him for the benefit of all. The religious sects of the time of Manimekalai could freely proclaim their rudimentary doctrines and intuitions. Some of them have disappeared. Others which are current today had not yet appeared or developed their doctrines. The Agamas had not yet been codified and committed to writing. The Bhakti literature of Vaishnavism and Saivism were yet centuries to come. But Siva, Vishnu and Murugan were emerging as the Names and symbols of the Ultimate Reality most acceptable to Tamilians. Soteriological myths were woven around Siva the Saviour : the Destroyer of the Three Cities, Tripurantaka ; the Saviour from the Cosmic poison, Vishapakarana Murti ; the Conqueror of death, Kalakala or Kala Samhara Murti or Mrtyumjaya and many another myth projected in poetry, song, dance and sculpture—the mystery that was being accomplished in the most secret core and sanctuary of man where he is alone with God.[8]

The typical Tamil society was essentially aristocratic : desire of fame and fear of shame were the distinguishing marks of the Sangam Tamil literature. Like pugazh or glory, vāymai, truth and honesty were greatly valued. The innate connection between being, speaking and acting the truth was recognized. Determination, bravery, liberality, munificence and mercy were also highly valued. The position of women was higher than what it became later. Tamil language itself stood not merely as the vehicle of communication of ideas but as the whole aesthetic achievement of the people. The study of its grammar gave the student a logical and metaphysical mental training. Mut–Tamil or threefold Tamil which included iyal, isai, natakam—literature, music and dance-drama—developed the student's aesthetic qualities. Voluntary renunciation, Turavu, was highly praised. Hospitality was so highly valued that the Nava Punyas of hospitality gave the structure for

8. Vatican II: Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, No. 16.

household and temple ceremonies of worship of the Deity, called Upacaras.

Buddhism and Jainism consisted of a world view, a set of doctrines and precepts for life and for salvation. Under their influence the Tamils composed their Sapiential literature under the class of Pathineṇkīzhkaṇakku. The most famous among these works is the Thirukkural. It may be called the compendium of Tamil culture, consisting of the enunciation of all the values that make up that culture. Whatever values had been scattered all over the earlier literature find their codification in it. God, transcendent and immanent (as the letter 'A' is immanent in all the other letters of the alphabet) is the Ultimate Reality and First Cause of the universe. To worship Him is salvation, to forget Him is damnation. After this introduction, Thirukkural divides itself into three parts : Aram, Porul and Inbam. While in Sanskrit, the values constituting Purushārthā or meaning and purpose of man are enumerated as dharmā, arthā, kāmā and mokshā, the Tamil values are virtue, the good things of this life and the bliss of love terrestrial as the foretaste of the celestial. Under Virtue, Aram, Thirukkural lists the virtues of the householder as well as of the ascetic, namely urbanity of speech, sense of gratitude, modesty, unimpeachable conduct, unflinching marital fidelity, forgiveness, sense of equality and fraternity, ahimsa or compassion in the literal sense of the word. Under the title of Porul, Thirukkural deals with the attributes of a good king or ruler; its injunctions are more honest and noble than the Chanakkiyan Machiavellianism. Unflinching fidelity to truth which is the opposite of pragmatism and diplomacy, honesty and impartiality are declared essential attributes of a good ruler. Nadu, which is often defectively translated as land, has all the properties of a welfare state. Nadu is described in Thirukkural as a kingdom where the soil is fertile and irrigated and producing abundant harvest, where the people are fully cultivated and integrated, where there is no shadow of internecine conflict or treachery, where there is absolute loyalty and complete equality. Even when treating of inter-state relationship, Thirukkural is far from being Machiavellian but rather inculcates strategy and tactics based on fundamental laws

and virtues. Culture is given special treatment. Paṇpu or culture was understood by the Tamils as 'paadu aṟintu ozhukal' i.e. understanding the feelings and desires of others and treating them as you would like to be treated by them. A sense of humour is inculcated as very essential to a man of culture. A sense of modesty is prescribed to go in company with bravery and munificence. In the third part called Kāmattuppāl, Kāmā is not lust. Kaṟṟārai-k-kaṟṟāre kāmuruvar, moorkarai moorkar mukarpar. Love is inbam, i.e. inner joy of the soul that unites the lovers. Meeting of lovers, their parting, pining and reunion which found exquisite treatment in the Sangam classics are analysed and explained succinctly in Thirukkural without descending to the pornographic vulgarities of a Kāmā Sutrā. This treatment stands midway between the treatment of the theme in the Sangam literature where details of lovemaking are mentioned at various places unconnectedly and the later Kovai works where they are all artificially arranged to form a psychological and aesthetic whole. We know that even this Kovai arrangement has been made use of by mystics to describe their dealings with the Divine Lover. Manikkavacagar's Thirukkovaiyar and the recent work Śaktinipatha Kovai are but two examples.

There were of course less laudable elements in ancient Tamil culture: promiscuity, prostitution, human sacrifice and a number of other evils which beset the fallen human condition. But they could not be the contribution of Tamil to Christianity but rather what Christianity could help any culture to rid itself of. But it is the positive values of Tamil culture which the nascent Christianity believed to be the elements of truth and goodness possessed by God's providence. She believed that God's Spirit who with a marvellous providence directs the unfolding of time was not absent from this development.[9] Doubtless the Holy Spirit was already at work before Christ was glorified.[10]

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9. Vatican II: Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, No. 26, para 5.

10. Vatican II: Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, No. 4.

Christianity

The Christian Church understands herself as a meta-cultural reality. "In virtue of her mission and nature she is bound to no particular form of human culture".[11] The prime contribution of Christianity to any nation and culture ought to be the contribution of itself, i.e. the fundamental Christian experience which is the revelation of God's love and call to man in Christ and man's surrender to God in and through Christ. This experience naturally expresses itself through a proclamation (Kerygma) of the truths and mysteries of this revelation. It involves also the acting out of this response through a community of love (Koinonia) and a humble self-dedication to the service of others (Diakonia). Under modern conditions and to meet modern needs, this ancient Christian life has developed also into works for the humanisation of society, for universal justice and for promoting goodwill and brotherliness among all men through loving dialogue. "From the beginning of her history she (the Church) has learnt to express the message of Christ with the help of the ideas and terminology of various peoples and has tried to clarify it with the wisdom of philosophers...For thus each nation develops the ability to express Christ's message in its own way".[12]

The Apostles and the first disciples made their proclamation and expressed their new experience in the vocabulary and idiom of their own relatives and countrymen. When they went outside Palestine it was either Greek or Roman idiom. We can therefore affirm that if any Apostle came to India he spoke in the Tamil idiom of those days, like the ancient rishis and seers and acharyas, convinced that Truth knows no distinction, East or West. If communication between the West and India had not been interrrupted for centuries afterwards, the life of this Indian community would have blossomed and flourished in exactly the same way as Saivism or Vaishnavism, with genuine Indian symbols and ideas giving expression to its ever-growing life and dynamism. In point of fact, the Syrian communities of Kerala did develop certain local

11. Vatican II: Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, No. 42.
12. *Ibid.* No. 44.

patterns of life and worship which might give a shock to the conservative Christians today, clerical or lay.

The theological basis of this development is the faith that Christ is the Saviour through His incarnation which involves a Kenosis, an emptying Himself of His divine glory which was His by right and an assumption of the nature, limitations and sufferings of man. Whatever He assumes from a new culture is necessary to reveal Him to the people of that culture and in the very act of assumption, whatever He assumes is purified, sanctified and glorified by His divinity.

This understanding has been demonstrated by the attitude and approach of the Church to the world cultures down the centuries. This has been irrefutably proved by great missionaries as we shall show a little later. This self-understanding of the Church as a meta-cultural reality also goes with her understanding of her prophetic role to judge cultures in the light of her Truth and her function as a catalytic agent of cultural change and development, in a positive and creative manner. In this lies her specific contribution to cultures. The barbarian hordes that invaded Europe in wave after wave were assumed and integrated into a European community. The Holy Roman Empire that resulted was pluralistic in its cultural manifestations, its spiritualities and even in thought patterns.

The Opening of India to the West

Communications between India and the West reopened after an interruption of centuries with the arrival of the Portuguese Captain Vasco da Gama. When he arrived in Malabar in 1498 he is reported to have learnt that there were some 20,000 Christians scattered along the West coast but that their Christianity did not consist in any thing more than their Christian names and an annual pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thomas in the East coast. The Portuguese came with the grandiose purpose of conquering the world for their God and their king. The Dutch, the French and the British came as traders carrying also their own brands of Christianity. With the capture of Goa by the Portuguese in 1510,

political conquest went along with their Portuguizing cultural aggression. This as well as their inquisitorial methods vitiated their zeal to spread the Christian faith as they understood it. They received into their padroado patronage mostly "those they found the readiest to accept Christianity, the waifs and strays of Hindu society", as Professor M. Ruthnaswami put it. They imposed their Portuguese surnames of them, portuguized them in the manner of dressing, eating and behaving and convinced them that they now belonged to a superior status and culture as well as to a supernatural religion. They denounced Hinduism in toto, pointing out to its real or imagined defects as proof for their denunciation and inculcated in their neophytes a contempt for their old religion. The Portuguese population itself was, in the polite words of Prof. Ruthnaswami, "wilting, uprooted as it was from its native soil and culture".[18] The Indian population found all this intolerable and termed the Portuguese and their converts 'Paranghis', despicable foreigners who spread by their easy morality the Paranghi disease in the country. We can surmise the ignorance on the part of the Portuguese and the laugh of scorn from self-respecting Indian hearers when the former titled their proselytising booklet as "Paranghikulam Puhuda Venumo?"

Heroic Missionaries

Religious Orders sent their missionaries to work with the diocesan clergy. Franciscans arrived in 1500, the Dominicans came in 1548, followed by Augustinians in 1572. When in 1540 the Society of Jesus was officially recognized by the Papacy as a religious order of the Catholic Church, the Portuguese king wanted six of the Jesuits to be sent to India. Ignatius Loyola, the Founder whose companions then numbered only ten, allotted two of them to go to the East Indies and one of them falling ill at the last moment, he sent in his place his most beloved disciple, Francis Xavier.

The greatest Christian missionary, after the Apostle St. Thomas, remembered not only in India but throughout the world, is St.

13. The Jesuits in India.

Francis Xavier. He renounced a professorship in the Sorbonne, Paris, came to India in 1542 and spent himself in the service of his faith till his death in 1552. Miraculous powers were attributed to him, but the greatest miracle was his consuming love of God combined with an equal love for his neighbour which extinguished every trace of self-love or self-interest. Hence he was an embodiment of the Indian values of Ahimsa, Satya, Shraddah and Mumukshutva. This was the secret of his greatness and missionary success, not his Spanish mentality, Portuguese connection or his medieval theology. His great contribution to Tamil culture was the gift of himself. Yet, "St. Francis Xavier cannot be forgotten in the list of those Europeans who first attempted to compose writings in the languages of India...We know what trouble he put himself to at the beginning to acquire the knowledge of the dialect of the Fishery Coast...To his influnce must be ascribed the keen activity which developed itself...towards a thorough knowledge of the Indian language", so writes Joseph Dahlmann S. J.[14] It was St. Francis Xavier who "pleaded that the most intelligent, most erudite and most devout men must be sent out to the East".[15]

A younger contemporary of St. Francis Xavier, Fr. Henriquez, devoted himself very earnestly to the study of Tamil. He wrote a Tamil grammar and a dictionary, a great and a small catechism, lives of the Saviour, of the Virgin Mary and other Saints as well as several apologetical works in Tamil, besides translating a number of treatises into Tamil. The original manuscripts found their way later on to the Vatican Library in Rome.[16]

By this time the Portuguese had established a printing press in Goa. And Fr. Henriquez's Catechism was the first Christian production printed in Tamil characters. A Spanish lay brother of the Society of Jesus cut the types in Tamil for the first time. His name was John Gonsalves. The earlier publications had been executed on a system of Latin transliteration. About the year 1580 appeared a Tamil translation of the Flos Sanctorum for

14. Missionary Pioneers and Indian Languages, p. 3.

15. *Op. cit.*

16. *Op. cit.*

which the Tamil types were cut by Fr. John de Faria, an artist, architect as well as technician. Fr. Henriquez in trying to convey the knowledge of the Christian mysteries had first resigned himself to transliterating the Latin or Portuguese terms in Tamil characters. Thus the term Gratia or grace was written in Tamil as kiraasai. The Holy Mass, Missa was written as Meesai. Avereza or avarice became Averaesai; castidade or chastity became Kasithithathe. Baptismo, baptism became Vavutheesumu, etc etc. We should, however, be grateful to Fr. Henriquez for having used the word "Om" instead of "Aam" to signify "yes".[17]

The missionaries very soon realised the inconvenience of such transliteration and they discontinued it. Some outlandish words, however, like Padre, Kumbsaar etc. still persist in Tamil and the neighbouring languages. Then the missionaries tried to express their concept of these realities according to the Scholastic theology of their day. "Piriyathattam", "Ishtaprasadam" to signify grace and other such coinings were in use till recently. Such coinages along with a prolific use of non-Tamil words created a sort of Christian Tamil which though not more un–Tamil than the MANIPRAVALA Tamil of the Saivite or Vaishnavite commentaries, yet came to be difficult of understanding to the Tamil speakers.

Policy of Adaptation

More than these handicaps of language, it was the Western manner of life of the missionaries and of the Christians that created a great wall of separation between the Indian population and Christianity. A revolutionary change in the missionary policy had to be introduced if any living contact between Christianity and the Tamil population had to be established. This revolution, we shall see, was but the rediscovery of the original attitude and approach of the Church to world cultures. A stout-hearted and noble-minded Jesuit of only 36 years of age came to the East with forty other religious in 1574. Only eight years in the Society, Fr. Alexandro Valignani had been appointed Visitor to all the

17. Christiani Vanakkam, Ch. 2. *Cf.* Un Catechisme Tamoul du XVIe Siecle en lettres Latines, par Jean Filliozat, Institut Français D'Indologie, Pondicherry—1967.

Eastern missions and given full powers for the execution of office. He enjoyed the complete confidence of the Society's General, Fr. Aquaviva. And Valignani's advice to the missionaries was: "Be Indian with the Indians, Japanese with the Japanese, Chinese with the Chinese. Make yourselves the natives of the country". His clear-sightedness had allowed him to understand that India, Japan and China were possessors of a tradition which had to be kept up in all things that did not go against the Faith. It was he who directed the great Fr. Ricci to adapt himself to the Chinese culture. And it was he who insisted that Rome should study this issue of adaptation in depth.[18]

In India an equally open-minded provincial superior, Fr. Laerzio was directing the affairs of the Malabar Province as it was then called. But he lacked field workers according to the mind of Fr. Valignani. For example, a Portuguese Jesuit was resident in Madurai since 1595 taking care of a hundered Christians there who were partly Portuguese and partly the people of the fiishery coast who came inland for trade. He was a holy man according to his lights. He had come out to India as a soldier, had met Fr. Henriquez and had become a Jesuit. He was running a school and a dispensary at Madurai which were popular. But he dressed in black and ate and went about as a Portuguese and so in the eyes of the middle and upper class Tamilians he was a Paranghi and therefore taboo. He had baptized only two adults on their death bed. The Provincial, Fr. Laerzio, was looking for field workers who, would implement his policy, when in 1606 a young Italian newly ordained priest arrived.

Fr. Robert De Nobili

Any student of relationship of Christianity with world cultures has perforce to study the life and message of Robert de Nobili, the fourth centenary of whose birth falls in September this year. Robert was born in 1577 at Rome as a scion of the 10th century Emperor Otto III, and as the nephew of Pope Julius III and of

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18. A Galaxy of Missionary Pioneers in the East, by Joachim Barranco S. J., 1952, pp. 22-2 4.

St. Robert Cardinal Bellarmine. He was a Tuscan with something of the other famous Tuscans like Michael Angelo, Leonardo Da Vinci, Savonarola and Galileo Galilei. His father was by birth the Count of Civitella and Robert, as the eldest son of the family, had the right to the same title. In 1599 while he was studying for the priesthood in the Society of Jesus he had to make a formal abdication of the title in favour of his younger brother who then came of age. Thus he acquired the moral right to the use of a title of Raja Rishi. His philosophical course in Naples where he joined the Society of Jesus at the age of 19, included logic, science, astronomy, metaphysics, psychology and ethics which came to be useful later on in his discussions with Brahmin philosophers of Madurai. He imbibed not only a thorough knowledge of the Scholastic Philosophy and Theology of his time but also a thorough knowledge of the missionary theory and practice of the Church for the fifteen centuries before him, which we have very briefly indicated earlier. And his great disappointment and shock on arrival in Tamil Nadu was the discovery of the great gap between the true mind of the Church and the practice of the Portuguese missionaries upto his time. He applied himself to the acquirement of a thorough grasp of not only Tamil and Telugu but also of Sanskrit.

His religious provincial Superior, Fr. Laerzio, brought him from Tuticorin to Madurai and left him for some time with the Portuguese Jesuit Fr. Gonsalves Fernandes we have mentioned above. After studying the mission policy on the spot Fr. de Nobili proposed to his superior Fr. Laerzio his suggestion for a future approach. Both of them agreed. We may quote from Fr. Laerzio's letter to his General in Rome written in 1609: "He (de Nobili) asked me permission to abstain from meat, fish, eggs and wine and to eat only rice and vegetables, using no other drink than milk and water...I gave him that permission, and also allowed him not to touch or deal with any people who according to their opinion are of low or vile condition and to take a Brahmin cook. He desired also to adapt himself in the matter of dress, as that of the Portuguese and other Christians is considered by them vile and despicable...I allowed him also to change his dress."

Robert de Nobili was convinced that he had the right to the status of a Raja Rishi or guru of the royal caste. He was also convinced that his studies, knowledge and capacity to impart it entitled him to the status of a Brahmin Sannyasi. *Brahmin Sannyasi* means, as Fr. A. Sauliere notes in his book "Red Sand" (p. 205 footnote), "the Sannyasi who deals with the Brahmins—not that he claimed to be born a Brahmin any more than the late Rev. G. U. Pope, who called himself Pope Aiyar. To hold the contrary opinion is to insult Indian intelligence." For de Nobili "Brahmin" ment a learned man, a guru. (Cf. "Informatio", "De Fundamentis", about which later.) He respected greatly the Brahmins for their knowledge of their scriptures and was happy to discuss with them and learn from them while also communicating to them what he had. He felt justified that he had the acharya-hood to communicate his experience of the Truth to the Tamilians and follow the line of the great rishis and philosophers. Thus he acquired his title of Tattuva Bothagar.

Christian communities among the Vellalas, Udaiyars, Nayakars, Reddies, Kammars etc. are due to his pioneering work. He did not scorn the depressed classes either but instructed them separately in deference to the high castes. It was only later political troubles and persecution that made him conceive the idea of a separate class of Christian missionaries called Pandara Swamys to cater to the spiritual needs of the depressed classes. It is a complete mis-understanding of his character and spirituality to accuse him of having supported caste distinction. Just as for Paul and other Apostles the slave was a brother in Christ for his master, so also all castes for de Nobili were brothers in Christ. And he taught and trained his converts to consider all as brothers in Christ. But as the early Christian preachers could not take upon themselves to do away with the system of slavery overnight—though it was far worse than the caste system — de Nobili in order to find an entrance to the heart of India had to put up with this caste distinction as a lesser evil. In this he followed St. Paul who circumcised Timothy even though he himself was against circumcision. Chrysostom comments that Paul circumcised in order to destory circumcision. Similarly we may say de Nobili observed

caste distinction in order to destory caste distinction. Just as the early Christian teaching contained in it the dynamism that would effect a total revolution of society and make slavery disappear, so too the Christian teaching of the missionaries in India had and still has in it the dynamism to create a better world without any distinction of caste, if it is only properly made use of.

The Dynamics of Adaptation

Now, these methods of adaptation gave rise to controversies which forced de Nobili to compose lengthy tracts in defence. These tracts are also contributions to Indian culture by helping India to understand Christianity and Christianity to understand India, while giving a vast amount of information about the mind and continued policy of the Church towards world cultures and religions. He wrote an Apologia — Responsio in 1610 in Latin, which is also available in English translation. When Pope Paul V convened a conference in Goa to study the methods of Madurai Mission, de Nobili wrote the treatise called "Narratio Fundamentorum quibus Madurensis Missionis Institutum Caeptum Est, et Hucusque Consistit" (An Exposition of the Basic Principles which Inspired the Founding of the Madura Mission and still continue to Guide It). This document was slgned by Francis Ros, Archbishop of Cranganore, and lone supporter of de Nobili, in order to obtain for it an impartial hearing at the Goa conference. It at least won the Jesuit theologians to its side but the Grand Inquisitor of Portugal, the Archbishop and the clergy of Goa and the members of the other Religious Orders voted against de Nobili. Finally his methods were approved by Pope Gregory XV. The approval lasted as long as de Nobili lived.

The document prepared for the Goa conference consists of two parts. The first part explains the constant policy of the Church of respecting the social and civil customs of the nations to which the Church carries the Christian message. The second part applies these principles to defend the details of practical experiments de Nobili had initiated in the Madurai Mission.

The continued practice of the Church was thoroughly studied and summarised by Fr. Robert de Nobili in this Exposition of

the basic principles which inspired the founding of the Madura Mission. The copious references to facts and declarations of the Church for the 15 centuries before him leave us in no doubt about the fundamental attitude of the Christian Church to the cultures she meets. "To sum up," Fr. de Nobili says, "the evangelical preacher following the precept of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the example of the Apostles is to make himself all to all and to take up that mode of life which will make him acceptable to the people among whom he works. We have explained how this mode of life requires holiness of life, solidity of doctrine and the adoption of the way of living of the people. In this consists the First Foundation on which stands the Madura Mission. Secondly, we find that the Church never prohibited the diverse customs and practices observed by different nations. This is the Second Foundation. Thirdly, we have seen how innumerable partially social and partially superstitious practices were allowed by the Church to continue after they had been rid of their superstitious elements. This is the Third Foundation. Finally, we have shown how the Church allowed innumerable *ceremonies* and *rites* which were *wholly religious* in character but which she rid of all superstition and turned into practices of Christian piety." The argumentation of de Nobili reiterates often that what he adopted from Tamil culture were only social customs. But it is significant that he said in Part I 5.1.2 : "The Church never prohibited diverse customs and practices of various nations provided they were not sinful." And he adduces six reasons to prove this assertion about the continued theory and practice of the Church. And in 5.1.4. he says, "Many *rites* and *ceremonies* which were *wholly religious* in character were converted by the Church into practices of Christian piety after removing from them any sign of superstition." De Nobili instances various practices of the Church including the direction given by Pope Gregory to Bishop Augustine in England to Christianise the old festivities of English converts. De Nobili tries to prove that they were social in nature and that they did not have any religious significance. This mentality survives even to this day in a section of the clergy and laity both Catholic and Protestant. They concede that we may abopt social

customs of the Hindus but not their religious customs. But the Fourth Foundation in which de Nobili has given the ancient practices of the Church of assuming even *rites* and *ceremonies* of other religions could have justified him better. It is this particular Fourth Foundation which Vatican II has now asserted in unambiguous terms.

Thus in the Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church (No. 9), Vatican II declares, "Whatever truth and grace are to be found among the nations this (missionary) activity frees from all taint of evil...Whatever good is found to be sown in the hearts and minds of men or in the *rites* and cultures peculiar to various peoples *is not lost*...it is healed, ennobled and perfected." "Thus they (the missionaries) themselves can learn by sincere and patient dialogue what treasures a bountiful God has distributed among the nations of the earth." (ibid. No. 11). Again, "the congregation of the faithful endowed with the riches of its own nation's culture should be deeply rooted in the people." (ibid. No. 15). The same document in another place (No. 19) says: "They (the congregation of the faithful) should embed her (the Church's) traditions in their own culture, thereby increasing the life of the Mystical Body by a certain mutual exchange of energies." Again (in No. 21) we read: "They should give expression to this newness of life in the social and cultural framework of their own homeland according to their own national traditions." The same is repeated in Para No. 22 which speaks about "the customs and traditions of the people, their wisdom and their learning, their arts and their sciences" from which the Church must borrow. All these are the developments of the Fourth Foundation of Robert de Nobili, in agreement with the ancient practices of the Church.

Robert de Nobili's treatise entitled "Informatio de quibusdam moribus nationis indicae" deals with some Indian social customs. This he wrote in order to inform his religious superiors who were already misinformed about such Indian customs. It is studded with Sanskrit and Tamil quotations to which Max Muller refers. Therein he summarises into eight statements what he has explained

at length in the first major portion of the treatise; each of these eight statements he got attested to be true by 108 non-Christian Brahmin scholars. Incidentally he chose the number 108 as it is considered a perfect number for Hindus as is the number 7 for the Hebrews.[19] In this treatise he clearly states the "two-fold rule"[20] to be observed in evaluating the nature of every Indian custom in order to adopt, adapt or reject it in the life of a Christian. We have already given a summary of his philosophy of adaptation earlier; suffice it to state here that his was not a policy of diplomacy but born out of devotion to the mind and tradition of the Church and of deep and sincere study of the Indian ways of life.

Many are the customs of Tamil Nadu that de Nobili adopted. As Dr. Rajamanickam S. J. points out,[21] "he built his Church in Indian style" whereas the Portuguese missionaries were continuing to build their churches in the Western Baroque style of their times. In this we have to confess that four hundred years after de Nobili the Indian Church has not moved much further.

He pleaded for the retention by the Brahmin converts of the Brahminical thread (பூணூல்), tilakam, tuft of hair (குடுமி), baths etc. etc. He also encouraged Christians to celebrate Pongal, adding a Cross in the celebration. He even allowed them to wear sacred ashes on the forehead as the universal Church wears them on Ash Wednesday as a sign of penance.[22]

His adaptations were really far-reaching in the sphere of language. He was so captivated by the Tamil language that in one of his letters written a year after his arrival in Madurai to his uncle Cardinal Bellarmine in Rome he refers to it as a language "which is very beautiful, very copious and most elegant."[23] No wonder he translated the names of Christian saints into Tamil.

19. Informatio, published by Dr. Rajamanickam S. J.

20. *Ibid.*, Ch. X, 10. 9.

21. The First Oriental Scholar, by Dr. Rajamanickam S.J., p. 87.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

Thus Peter became Malaiyappan; (Later missionaries seem to have shied away from Malaiyappan and borrowed from Telugu the word Rayappan); Fidelis became Visuvasam; Constantius, Dairiyam; Hilary, Muthudaiyan; Deusdedit, Sivadharma (sic); Honoratus, Assarappan; Joachim, Devarambar; Lazarus, Devasahayam; Elizabeth, Devannammal, etc.[24]

Tattuva Bothagar's Tamil Writings

De Nobili's external appearance did not merely conform to that of Indian Sannyasis but was such as proclaimed him a Christian acharya. His external appearance truly expressed what he was and what he experienced in the depth of his soul. He discovered that the soul of Indian culture is the culture of the soul. And hence three years after his arrival, in 1609 appeared his Attuma Nirnayam, the science of the soul. In the three years of its composition, which was sufficient to win for him his Tamil name of TATTUVA BOTHAGAR, he had marshalled all that he had imbibed from his scholastic philosophy and theology concerning the human soul and arranged them in an order that would satisfy his Tamil enquirers. In order to explain the nature of the human soul and its relationship with the body, he first considers non-living things and analyses them into the co-principles of matter and form. He then explains living beings and shows how life also fulfills the function of 'form' in 'matter'. Then he takes up beings with sensation like animals and finally he comes to the consideration of man and shows how the atma or soul fulfills all the functions of lower forms. Incidentally, he refutes in this place the possibility of transmigration of soul.[25] He then begins to theologize on the life of the soul through supernatural grace. Then he takes us to the elevated life of the just and their knowledge by which they see everything in God.

24. The First Oriental Scholar, by Dr. Rajamanickam S.J., pp. 55 & 190.

25. Cf. Sivavakkiyar's Stanza (48):

கறந்தபால் முலைப் புகா கடைந்த வெண்ணெய் மோர்புகா
உடைந்துபோன சங்கின் ஓசை உயிர்களும் உடல்புகா
விரிந்தபூ உதிர்ந்த காயும் மீண்டுபோய் மரம்புகா
இறந்தவர் பிறப்பது இல்லை இல்லை இல்லை இல்லையே.

Finally he deals with the vision of God in heaven. Thus he has rearranged a whole treatise with the concept of the soul as the central theme. In a country where atma-vidya was the great discipline of the ancient rishis, Attuma Nirnayam was thus quite relevant a publication. And yet we have to point out its limitations. Even de Nobili could not come out of the limitations of the Thomistic philosophy of his place of origin. Hylemorphism was his thought pattern. He could not think of Indian categories of thought.

Attuma Nirnayam was followed in quick succession by other works so that when he died in 1656 more than twenty volumes of manuscripts on palm leaves were left behind. He wrote for the learned as well as the ordinary folk. For the learned he wrote in verse as was traditional in India. For the common folk he wrote in the prose as they spoke it. Thus unconsciously he became a great pioneer of Tamil prose free from being attached to poetry. His Tamil prose works besides Attuma Nirnayam were Gnana Upadesa Kāndam (in four volumes), Nitya Sīvana Sallāpam (Dialogue on Eternal life), Thūshana Thikkāram (Refutation of Calumnies) and others, fourteen in all. These have been published by Fr. Dr. S. Rajamanickam S. J.

Dahlmann remarks, "Fr. de Nobili...keeping within the canons of Tamil grammar and taking advantage of the concessions granted in it, was not afraid of coining new words and phrases adapted from Sanskrit and thus enriching the already large vocabulary of Tamil. The style and mode of expression are so genuinely Tamil that one would say that his works have been composed not by a European but by an Indian for Indians. Even now it is hard to recognize the foreigner either in the mode of thought or in the way of expression."

De Nobili's memory was prodigious. Quoting Fr. Giacintho de Magistris,[26] Dahlmann refers to it: "Before setting to work, he (de Nobili) had disposed it all with so much order that he quotes in the first chapter what he has to say many chapters

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26. Relations della Christianita di Magure, Roma, 1661, 340.

further, and in one book he refers to what he will say so many chapters later in another, as if he had the whole work before his mind with its divisions into books, chapters and paragraphs; an evident proof of his great talent and memory."

De Nobili's mastery of Tamil was such that he could write verses in it. The same writer Fr. Giacintho de Magistris says: "His devotion to the Blessed Virgin was remarkable. For the benefit of Christians he composed in Tamil verses a book on her life which all classes of people everywhere take delight in singing."[27]

As for Nobili's knowledge of Sanskrit, we have the testimony of Max Muller who declared:[28] "I can only speak of him as the first European Sanskrit scholar. A man who could quote from Manu, from the Puranas, nay, from works such as the Apastamba Sutras which are known even at present to only those few Sanskrit scholars who can read Sanskrit manuscripts, must have been far advaneed in knowledge of the sacred language and literature of the Brahmins."

But "unfortunately these writings (of de Nobili)", deplored Fr. J. Bertrand S. J.[29] "are thus far confided only to palm leaves and run the risk of being annihilated, which would be nothing short of an irretrievable loss to the Mission." And as Dahlmann notes, his Sanskrit works have perished with the palm leaves that contained them except the "Satya Veda Sara Sangraha" or Epitome of Catholicism, 172 Sanskrit slokas of two or four verses (sic) each, and parts of a "Ritual" for feast days. De Nobili composed Mantras and Slokas to be recited during the performance of the various ceremonies which he adopted from Hindu rites of marriage, etc.

De Nobili wrote in Tamil "not only all that an ordinary Christian should know but also what was necessary for Catechists and even priests. The Christian message became incarnate in Tamil thanks to his efforts." Dr. Rajamanickam S. J. concludes

27. *Ibid., op. cit.*

28. Lectures on the Science of Language, London, 1866.

29. La Mission du Madure, Vol. III, p. 116.

from his study that de Nobili may be called the Father of Tamil Prose.[30] It was strange that Kamil Zvelebil in his paper "Introducing Tamil Literature 1968" says (in p. 18) that Ananda Rangam Pillai (1709–1761) became the father of modern Tamil prose, though he adds: "The language used by Ananda Rangam Pillai seems to have been a rather close and only slightly formalised reflection of the informal speech used among the French Tamils of the eighteenth century." De Nobili wrote prose a century before Ananda Rangam Pillai. About de Nobili's Tamil style, Dr. Rajamanickam S. J. says further,[31] "As Nobili was the originator of modern Tamil Prose, he had no example to imitate how far was literary prose to free itself from the rules of poetry on the one hand and colloquial Tamil on the other. So certain expressions which may seem colloquial are found in his writings. He could have avoided them, but seeing that the most learned used such expressions in their ordinary speech he also made use of them." That his knowledge of Tamil religious books was deep can be gauged from the numerous quotations he takes from them. For instance, while referring to the monotheism among Tamils in one of his treatises he quotes the first verse from Sivagnana Cittiar.[32]

Besides the positive contribution he made to Tamil Christian literature, the controversial tracts which he was obliged to write by circumstances and under obedience have also contributed vastly to Indian culture by explaining the true attitude of the Church throughout the centuries towards world religions and cultures. De Nobili of course was a missionary, whose first preoccupation was the spreading of his faith. But having acquired a deep knowledge of the culture of the people to whom he wished to present

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30. The first Oriental Scholar, by Dr. Rajamanickam, S.J., p. 223.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
32. Information :

ஒருவனொ(டு) ஒருத்தி ஒன்றென் றுரைத்திடும் உலகமெல்லாம்
வருமுறை வந்து நின்று போவதும் ஆத லாலே
தருபவன் ஒருவன் வேண்டும் தான்முதல் ஈறும் ஆகி
மருவிடும் அனாதி முத்தன் சித்துரு மன்னி நின்றே.

Christ, he developed a profound love for Tamil culture and could no more consider it as a mere instrument of propagating the message of Christ but thought of it as something destined to become part and parcel of the life of the Church.

Pearl to Tamil

Vincent Cronin has titled his life of Robert de Nobili "A PEARL TO INDIA". It was his saintly life that was his greatest contribution to Tamil culture. What the biographer of his uncle St. Robert Cardinal Bellarmine says about him can be applied with equal force to his nephew Fr. Robert de Nobili. It was the integration of intense spiritual life with a prodigious intellectual achievement which was most miraculous. Fr. Proença wrote in 1660, four years after de Nobili's death: De Nobili's "austere penance, nobility of character which made him overcome all dangers and sufferings, an incredible meekness which made him accept...all kinds of contempt, accusations and infamy without experiencing the least feeling of anger or bitterness towards them as he ingenuously confessed; a loving devotion to the Holy Virgin, an ardent love for Jesus crucified, a constant union with God amidst fatigues and worries...; humility and obedience which shone forth in all his letters; finally his self-mastery, the serenity of his face and affable manners which, joined with the dignity of a high stature, the nobility of a majestic gait inspired all who dealt with him with benevolence and commanded a kind of veneratioon..."

Fr. Proença also wrote: "I call him a saint because such he was in the estimation of all unprejudiced men who knew him and such he was proclaimed by all who enjoyed his intimate intercourse." Fr. Proença only confirmed what had been written about de Nobili fifty years before by his intimate companion Fr. Vico in his letter to the General of the Society, on Oct. 25, 1610, in which we find also a little more on de Nobili's natural talents as follows: "Shall I speak to you of that consummate science which exposes the most obstruse questions of theology as if they were child's play, of that supple talent with which while making himself understood by the ignorant he knows how to interest and charm scholars, of that fertile eloquence which astonishes by

the richness of its expressions, in spite of the variety and difficulty of the idioms of these people, of his gentle art to embellish and render amiable the most forbidding subjects, that care with which he appropriates the ways, forms and manners, however strange, of the people of this country, and finally that power of persuasion with which he sways the minds of the great and the small?"

We shall close this all too brief account of this great Christian missionary who inspired and still inspires all those who are interested in mutual enrichment of cultures and religions with a brief sentence he wrote about his saintly uncle whose name he bore, viz. Cardinal Robert de Nobili, who had died rather very young: "He was a man whom virtue welcomed at his birth, learning cherished through life and modesty raised above his fellowmen." How it applies to the writer himself!

"Before de Nobili died in 1656, the Mission was recognized by the State as an Indian Institution. Its Superior had a patent from the Nayak and his companions were assured of his protection and given explicit permission to preach their religion and make disciples. They had a sort of official standing like any other sect in the Kingdom. This did not save them from all difficulties but if things came to the worst they could appeal to the Nayak and obtain redress."[33]

But what redress could they obtain from internal persecutions by their own brethren?

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33. **Red Sand, by Fr. A. Sauliere S. J., p. 288.**

LECTURE II

CHRIST TO TAMIL AND TAMIL TO CHRIST

Robert de Nobili initiated the work of Indianizing the Church in Tamil Nadu or, as modern theologians would phrase it, of building up a genuine local Church, i.e. liberating it from a culture foreign to India and enfleshing it with Tamil culture. His companion Fr. Emmanuel Martinez, a Portuguese, was called in Tamil Jaganivasagar. He followed de Nobili strictly in regime of life, dress and diet. This, by the way, proves that when de Nobili declared that he was not a Paranghi, it was not due to any trace of contempt for the Portuguese. Martinez continued de Nobili's work when the latter left Madurai in 1646 and he died a victim of his own self-imposed austerities and his charity in 1656, the same year as de Nobili died in Madras. He left behind him from the store of his consummate sanctity a number of soul-stirring Tamil books: Gnana Poochendu, Meditations on the Passion and death of the Saviour, Gnana Muthu Malai and several other smaller works and several incomplete works.

Fr. Antony de Proenza who died in 1666 had worked out a great Tamil dictionary. In 1679 the Jesuit press at Ambalacad brought out a greater dictionary integrating the manuscript remains of FF. de Nobili, Bruno and Martin. The Jesuits built up a large library at Cochin containing rare manuscripts in Hebrew, Chaldaic Arabic, Persian and Indian and Chinese languages. When in 1663 the Dutch Huguenots took Cochin they destroyed the library. We hear that the soldiers tore the pages of books to light their cigars. A century later Tippu Sultan wrought the same havoc on the printing press and library at Ambalacad.

The heroic missionary after St. Francis Xavier whom the Church has sainted is St. John de Britto (1647-1693) known affectionately in Tamil Nadu as Arulanandar. From first to last he was a missionary consumed with zeal for his faith and he laid

down his life for it. But he came in the tradition of de Nobili and he was a Pandara Swamy. He pleaded with his superiors for the continuation of the policy of de Nobili. He wrote to his Superior General in Rome in his annual report for 1683: "Fr. Robert de Nobili of holy memory, that great servant of God and model of missionaries, having recognized with St. Ambrose that the first incentive to learning is the master's nobility (primus discendi ardor nobilitas est magistri,)[1] making himself all to all so as to win all men to Christ, assumed the dress of Brahmin sannyasis, lived in the heart of the country and strictly conformed to the Indian way of living, calling himself a Roman Brahmin sannyasi which is equivalent to a Roman religious sage...What a misfortune it would be if, after Our Lord has by that means thrown the door open, the devil were to close it by instigating someone to send in the interior of the country, for the disgrace of the faith, missionaries dressed like Europeans and priding themselves in the name of Paranghis (foreigners, half-caste, and low caste people). Surely the experience of centuries should undeceive their mistaken zeal, and so also the reliable information supplied by those who seeking only the glory of God have resolutely given up even the customs in which they had been brought up and which have become to them like a second nature..." Thus we see the attitude to Tamil culture was maintained by the Jesuit missionaries through all trials and difficulties.

God blessed this sustained effort by sending to India three great Jesuits whose names will be remembered for ever. Thomas Stephens (1549–1619), an Englishman, worked in the Marathi and Konkani area. John E. Hanxleden, a German, arrived in Goa in 1701 and worked in Malabar. The third who is our hero was Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi (1680–1747), an Italian. These were first and foremost missionaries. Their writings can be arranged in three classes; first they wrote grammars and dictionaries of their regional languages to help their fellow missionaries. Secondly, their theological, explanatory prose writings enriched the prose literature of their region. But they won their fame by their poetic

1. Compare Nannul, description of Nallasiriyan.

creations — Stephens by his Christhu Purana in 11,000 stanzas in a mixture of Marathi and Konkani, Hanxleden by his life of Christ in 10,000 couplets and other poems in Malayalam and our Beschi by his epic, Thembavani, and Thirukavalur Kalambagam.

Beschi brought to Tamil Nadu the wealth of Latin poetry which came from the outpourings of the great mystics of Christianity throughout the centuries. God-drunk men had sung spiritually inebriating hymns that were still in use in the Church. Milton is reported to have said that he would have given all his compositions in exchange for just the three short lines of an unknown Latin mystic : Tuba mirum spargens sonum, Per sepulchra regionum, Cogens omnes ante tronum. Such lines abound in Church hymns. Beschi had also drunk deep into the Latin and Italian poetry of such masters as Virgil, Dante and Tasso. Dante loved to call the Virgin Mary the daughter of her Son and we see this beautifully incorporated in every possible rhyme and rythm Beschi could command in Tamil. See உந்தையை ஈன்று நீ........ ஒருவற்கு ஈங்கு அரும், வந்தையோடு அன்னையும் மகளும் ஆயினை. (cf. Thirukavalur Kalambagam).

And in Thembavani a whole chapter—Chitra Kuda Padalam—is replete with imagery inspired by Tasso's Gerusalemme Liberata, Liberation of Jerusalem. Thus the riches of Latin and Italian poetic experience flowed into the mainstream of Tamil culture, two hundred years before Subramaniya Bharathi sang that we must bring into Tamil the wealth of the nations.

We noted in our first lecture how de Nobili had already translated the proper name Constantius as Dairiyanathan. And Beschi readily assumed this name. (Constantius is the Latin form of Costanzo). It is reported that the title of Veeramamunivar was bestowed on him by the Tamil Sangam of Madurai.

As we have already mentioned, Beschi's writings fall into three broad categories. The first category includes dictionaries and grammars intended primarily for his fellow missionaries. The grammar of Kodunthamizh belongs to this class, Beschi being the first to use this term 'kodum' in the sense of colloquial as

opposed to literary Tamil. He wanted the missionaries to equip themselves quickly for contact with the people. It was left to their taste and ability to master its literature. Some missionaries, unfortunately, have always been satisfied with this kodunthamizh, thus perpetuating what is called Christian Tamil. But Beschi's work on Senthamizh became the starting point of all modern grammatical studies in Tamil. Beschi with his knowledge of European languages could organize the grammatical rules of Tamil into a consistent and intelligible system. He knew Italian, Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Portuguese. In India he learnt Tamil, Sanskrit, Telugu and Urdu. His grammar of Senthamizh in Latin is admirable for its conciseness and clarity. It was indeed the forerunner of the Science of Philology. Nannul consists of 462 verses to cover only two sections of grammar, ezhuthu and sol; Pavanandi Munivar died before he could write the other sections. Beschi incorporates a few of his sutras in his work Thonnul Vilakkam, but he has completed in 370 verses all the five sections of grammar, viz. ezhuthu, sol, porul, yāppu and aṇi, adding his own commentaries in prose. Prof. Thomas Srinivasan remarks trenchantly: "It is a sufficient commentary on the obscurantism of all those responsible for the teaching of Tamil in the school to say that this excellent work was printed only in 1891 and never again since then."[2] Beschi also was the first scientific lexicographer of Tamil. A Latin-Tamil dictionary and a Portuguese-Tamil dictionary were followed by the Caturakarathi, Tamil to Tamil. His restoration of the dots to consonants, and the introduction of double loop symbol for certain consonants are too well known for us to elaborate here. Fr. Dr. V. M. Gnanapragasam S. J. has dealt with them sufficiently in his doctoral thesis.

Among Beschi's prose writings, the well-known story of Paramartha Guru was meant as exercise in reading Tamil prose without boredom. Most of his prose writings were polemical tracts against the Protestants of Tranquebar like Veda Vilakkam and Pethakam Maruthal. Vediyar Ozhukam is the best positive work of Beschi in prose. It is a guide book for catechists.

2. New Review, 1935, Vol. II.

In the judgement of the historians of the Society of Jesus, if Beschi had remained in Italy and sung his songs in Italian he would have been today one of the world-famous poets of Europe. But he learnt Tamil and was inebriated with its poetry. With his exquisite taste for sounds, keen aesthetic perception, prodigious memory for words and phrases, and marvellous imagination, he allowed his soul to soak itself in the beauty of not only the language but also of nature in Tamil Nadu whose Ain-tinai, Kurinji, Mullai, Marutham, Neithel and Paalai, evoked a sympathetic response in him. His sensitive soul reverberated in unison with the temperaments and ethos of the people of Tamil Nadu, and their peculiar ways of expressing their experiences which they had classified as ninefold, nava rasam. We find ample evidence to this in his poems.

To give one example of Beschi's love of Tamil, his deep appreciation of its gentleness, its sweetness and its music, we may quote the following verse occuring as the very last stanza appropriately in Mahizhvinai Padalam, which describes the joy of St. Joseph and the Bl. Virgin expecting the Baby Jesus to be born:

தண்தமிழ்ச் சொல்லும் நூலும்
சால்பொடு கடந்த வண்ணத்து
உண்டுஅமிழ்து உவப்பின் உள்ளத்து
ஓங்கும்இவ் இருவர் தம்முள்
பண்தமிழ் உரைத்த தேபோல்
பயன் பகர்ந்து இளவல்காண
மண்டுஅமிழ்து உகும்அவாவின்
மகிழ்வினை உரைப்பர் ஆரோ? *(133)*

His poetic works cover a wide range. Kitheri Ammal Ammanai is a long lay or ballad of 1,100 kaṇṇis in Veṇsen Turai narrating the life of the Portuguese Saint Quitteri, whose cult Beschi popularised. The second one, Annai Azhungal Anthathi, deals with the sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and seems to be connected with the Passion Plays which are a feature in Tamil Catholic communities. His Tevaram in 12 stanzas is said to have been sung by Beschi himself as a dirge while accompanying

the bier of dead persons to the grave. It is called Karuṇāmbara Pathigam. The first stanza starts with:

மூவா முதலா முற்றிணையா
மூவாளாய்ஓர் மெய்ப்பொருளாய்...

The 3rd stanza is as follows, the last two lines reminiscent of Tiruvacakam but more applicable to the Christian Eucharist:

வான்கொள் ஒளிசெய் சுடர்படைத்தி,
மண்கொள் பலநல் உயிர்படைத்தி,
கான்கொள் கனியோ(டு) அலர்படைத்தி,
கதிர்கொள் மணியோ(டு) அணிபடைத்தி,
யான்கொள் எவையும் நீபடைத்தி,
இவைசால்(பு) அன்(று)என்(று) உணத்தந்தி,
ஊன்கொள் உருநீ ஆயினபின்
உன்தாள் பணியா வாறென்னே ?

—கருணும்பரம், கருணும்பரம்.

This idea will come frequently in Beschi; for example in Thembavani, Mahizhvinai Padalam stanza 73 :......பேரெழுங் கருணையானே பின்னையும் தன்னைத் தந்தான்.

The major poetic composition among his minor works is Thirukavalur Kalambagam, in 1717, in honour of Our Lady of Elakurichi on the northern banks of the Cauvery. Beschi named it Thirukavalur, the place of Holy Protection, in honour of the Bl. Virgin Mary whom he took as the Patroness of its Church under the title of Our Lady of Refuge, Adaikala Nāyaki. It remained his centre of activity till 1742 and has become a place of pilgrimage from his time and continues to be such even now. His Kalambagam is indeed a poetic and musical cocktail. "Mr. Sethu Pillai has set this gem on a background of exquisite beauty narrating in mellifluous Tamil prose the remarkable story of this sanctuary as found in the authentic letters of its early period and interspersing the poet's own lines in appropriate places". Thus writes S. Gnanapragasar O.M.I. of Nallur, Jaffna, in his preface to the book of Prof. R. P. Sethu Pillai, called Thirukāvalūr Kōvil.

This Kalambagam begins with the exquisite stanza in Kattalai kalithurai as Kāppu:

பாற்கடற் கன்னிச்சங் கிங்கண் அரிதிற் பயந்தளித்த
மேற்கடல் தேவ திருமுத்தம் பூண்டு விரிதமிழ்ப்பா
நாற்கடல் தொல்லங் துறைசேர்ந்து காவலூர் நங்கைஎனும்
நூற்கடல் தேஅமுது அள்ளி நுகர்வான் நுவன்றிடவே.

In the milky ocean there is a virgin conch shell which miraculously has brought forth the divine pearl of heaven. This pearl I adorn myself with as my protection and launch into the four oceans of Tamil prosody and I shall bring in the riches of Tamil poetry to sing the praises of the great Protectress of Kavalur. For the depth of his theological vision of creation which he embeds in his poetry we could give the following as an example.

தனைக்காட்டத் தன்திறம்சீர் தயைஞானம்
மற்(று)அரும்தன் தகுதி காட்டத்
தகும்வழியால் தகாச்செல்வோன் உனைப்படைப்பக்
கருதிப்பின் தரணி யெங்கும்
உனைக்காட்ட இரவிமதி உடுவினங்கள்
நவமணிமற்(று) ஒளியின் சால்பும்
உரிமணம்மூ வகைமலர்ப்பூ ஒண்கனிதேன்
அமு(து)இனிமை உகுத்த யாவும்
மினைக்காட்டப் பெய்தமுகில் வியன்கடல்நீர்
இவ்வழகு வேய்ந்த எல்லாம்
விண்ணிடத்தும் மண்ணிடத்தும் விருப்பங்கொண்டு
உனையுள்ளி விதித்தான் அன்றோ?
நினைக்காட்ட எழில்காட்டும் இவைகண்(டு)உன்
அடிதொழும்நான் நிறைய வாழ
நினைக்காட்டா யோமரியே திருக்காவ
லூர்நிலையே நிமலத்தாயே. (5)

If Beschi is called the greatest among the poets who sang in a language not their mother tongue it is due to his epic Thembavani. H. A. Krishna Pillai is said to be the Kamban of Christianity. The title applies equally, if not better, to Beschi. Kamban did not translate Valmiki's Ramayana. He created a Tamil Ramayana with a Tamil Rama, a Tamil Sita and other

Tamil characters. The country and capital of Rama's kingdom became the Tamil country and its capital in conception and description. Kamban can be said to have Tamilised Rama and Ramayana. Veeramamunivar has done the same with every one of the Biblical and Christian characters, places, events and episodes in his epic. Judea and its towns and villages became at his hand Tamil Nadu and its villages.

Beschi dived into the depths of Tamil literature with his voracious poetic appetite and the poet in him emerged as a perfect Tamil. Fragments of famous Tamil poets like Ilango, Thiruthakka-devar, Kamban, Sekkilar and of course Thiruvalluvar constantly surface in his poetry almost in spite of himself. Often he ladles up a verse from a master and attaches a part of it to his own composition. Mirabeau is quoted as saying that originality consists in knowing how to make use of other people's work. This is in the tradition of the best Tamil poets who easily appropriate the lines that they appreciate best in other poets.

" முன்னோர் மொழி பொருளேயன்றி
அவர் மொழியும் பொன்னேபோல் போற்றுவம் யாம்."

According to Tamil grammar, a Kavyam must contain what is called the four-fold purusharta i.e. அறம், பொருள், இன்பம், வீடு. The Jain works usually omitted the third element, i.e. erotic element and they were blamed for it. Thiruthakadevar tried to make up for it by an overdose of sensuous scenes. Beschi was a Catholic priest and his theme was divinely majestic; hence he was prevented from exploiting this aspect of Indian poetry but he has given us here and there just a hint of what he could have done if he had so wished. Neepahan's temptation in the 20th padalam and the episode of Samson etc. may be pointed out as examples.

Veeramamunivar adhered strictly to the norms of composing a Tamil epic and thus presented an incomparable and priceless necklace to Tamil. Thus he speaks about the country and its capital in two chapters, Nattu Padalam and Nagara Padalam, before he comes to sing of the birth of his hero. Ayodya, the capital of Dasaratha's kingdom, is, in Kamban's epic, built around

the royal palace as its centre. But Veeramamunivar's Jerusalem is temple-centred like Madurai of the Pandyas. While Kamban describes the royal palace as நிலமகள் முகமோ திலகமோ கண்ணோ etc., Beschi describes the temple of Jerusalem in similar words and exactly the same refrain: மண்ணிய முடியோ முடியின்மா மணியோ etc.

The theme of this great work of Beschi is the life and message of his patron Saint, the foster-father of Jesus. Now St. Joseph is the most silent man in the Bible. Not a word of his is reported in the Gospels. But the hero of an epic according to Tamil norms has to be peerless in personal beauty, eloquence of speech, courage and bravery, tenderness of feelings, munificence etc. etc. Beschi's Joseph, who was "the just man" in God's eyes according to the Gospel, comes out with all his inner beauty and greatness eloquently depicted by the pen of this Italian Tamil poet. St. Joseph is one who has not only all the qualities of Neethār—those who have renounced the world—but also the qualities required of a householder. Basing himself on these recorded facts about his patron saint, Veeramamunivar created a great epic. The Puranic propensities of Indians gave him the freedom to draw freely from the pious legends of Christian countries. He acknowledges in his Avaiyadakkam that what he narrates in his epic is taken from a miraculous life of St. Joseph believed to have been narrated by the Virgim Mary herself appearing several times to a saintly nun and mystic in Spain called Mary d'Agri. In this way Thembavani is a marvellous intergration of pure Christian teaching and Tamil epic with Puranic traditions and techniques.

St. Joseph can be described as an incarnation of silence and resignation to the Will of the Almighty—not the passive resignation of a frustrated man but the adventurous heroic submission to an all-wise and almighty Will. Hence it was he to whom the greatest treasure in heaven and on earth was committed for safe-keeping, as the welfare of the Egyptian empire was committed by Pharoah to the Joseph of the Old Testament. This is justification enough for Beschi to describe his patron saint as an

unparalleled hero in joy and suffering, in peace and war. Beschi describes him also as one of the great rishis or munivars, sharing his profound intuitions with similar jnānis. In Thembavani Joseph shines as an eloquent speaker, reminding us of Manimekalai. The topics he discusses are Indian topics like karma, rebirth, vithi etc.

Though Beschi does not believe in the workings of karma as it is ordinarily explained, the way of talking among the Tamils when they meet with unexpected hardships, is found in the manner in which Beschi makes his characters speak. When, for example, Joseph and Mary find no place in the inn of Bethlehem, these words are put on the lips of St. Joseph:

"நான்செய்த குறைதானோ?
நகரே செய்த நவைதானோ?
தான்செய்த விதிதானோ?
தரணி காக்கத் தற்பரன்ஈங்கு
ஊன்செய்த உடலொடுஉழ
இடம்ஒன்று இல்லை உலகில்" எனுத்
தேன்செய்த பூவுயர்த்தோன்
அரற்றி விம்மித் திரிவானும்.

(Mahavarul Padalam, 65)

Note also the qualified meaning of vithi here; it means just the will of God.

The paradoxes of Christian doctrines give Beschi the mystic great scope for waxing eloquent. For instance, when he describes the traumatic experience of St. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin in losing the 12 year old child Jesus in Jerusalem, Beschi's words flow with Kamban's overtones thus:

இறந்தான் கொல்லோ முதல்ஈறில்லோன்,
தனது ஆர் தயையை
மறந்தான் கொல்லோ மறவா அன்போன்,
கடல்சூழ் வையம்
துறந்தான் கொல்லோ, உன்னை என்னைத்
துறந்தான், இதுவே
அறந்தான் கொல்லோ மகனே அறைகஎன்று
அழுதான் வளனே. (25)

He who has no birth and no death, is He dead? He who never forgets to love, has he forgotten his plenitude of grace? The paradoxes of incarnation come out in such poignant words as these.

The creative imagination of the epics and the puranas also offers Beschi ample models for similar creations to suit his purpose. His Chitra Kuda Padalam reminds us of scenes from Aranya Kandam. The ascetics in the forest usually give hospitable reception to new comers and wayfarers. Hundred ascetics received Rama. And Beschi also creates 100 ascetics to receive the Holy Family on the way to Egypt. In Kamba Ramayanam the meeting with the ascetics gives rise to exchange of ideas, discussions and explanations of unknown things and events of the past. In Thembavani, the meeting with the ascetics, in addition to recalling the Biblical happenings of old, supplies also the missionary opportunity for St. Joseph to discuss doctrines and offer spiritual advice. Vāman Ātchi Padalam, Neepahan beguiling Sasan and assuming mahima size, and a hundred women turning into Rakshasis all these bring before our eyes situations from Ramayanam.

Thembavani is a Christian epic. In it Christian mysteries, doctrines, explanations and argumentations find their due place interspersed with heroic deeds and great acts of self sacrifice found in the Old and New Testaments. Thus Veeramamunivar has carved out a respectable niche for Christianity in the temple of Tamil literature, as Prof. M. Ruthnaswamy put it. Some of the cardinal tenets of Christian religion thus incorporated in Tamil cultural idioms ought to be mentioned.

The Christian purusharta or the purpose of human life is to know the true God, to love Him and to serve Him and thus attain salvation. The true God, while He is in himself unknowable, reveals Himself through His creatures as well as through the enlightening faith which He lights up in the hearts of the believers. He is described as having six attributes which de Nobili had put in a Sanskrit sloka: Swayambhu, Anadi, Asarīri etc. Beschi in his Thembavani enunciates them in a virutham:

தன்வயத் தாதல்,[1] முதல்இலன் ஆதல்,[2]
தகும்பொறி உருவிலன் ஆதல்,[3]
மன்வயத் தெல்லா நலம்உள ளாதல்,[4]
வயின்தொறும் வியாபக ளாதல்,[5]
பின்வயத் தின்றி ஒருங்குடன் அனைத்தும்
பிறப்பித்த காரண ளாதல்[6]
பொன்வயத்து ஒளிர்வான் முதல்எலா உலகும்
போற்றும்மெய் இறைமையின் நிலையே.

(Gnāpaga Padalam, 157)

The first, the greatest and the central mystery of Christianity is that of the Holy Trinity, one undivided Godhead being adored as Three Persons. Beschi refers to it in several places in his epic. For e.g.

ஒரு நாதன் என்று தனிஏக னின்றும்
ஒருமூவர் என்று பெயராய்...

and in another place he sings:

...பிதா, சுதன், நேயன் எனும்
மூவொரும் ஓர் நிக ராத பராபர மா முதலோன்...

In yet another place, he simply says ஒன்றும் மூவர். Similarly in his Karunambara Pathigam he refers to it as மூவாளாய் ஓர் மெய்ப்பொருளாய்.

That the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity became man is Christian faith. Scholastic theology has coined the phrase "hypostatic union", the union of human and divine natures in the one divine Person of Christ, to signify this ineffable reality. This theology is enshrined by Beschi in the following verse (where he uses the word துவம் tuvam to mean "nature"):—

பூட்டிய புணர்ச்சிப் பாலால்
புணர்இரு துவங்கள் வேருய்க்
கூட்டிய ஒருவ ஞய
குணத்தவன் மனுவும் என்பான்,
ஈட்டிய நலங்கள் குன்ரு
இறைவனும் என்பான், இவ்வாய்
சூட்டிய கருணை நன்னூல்
துறைவலோர் அடையும் பாலோ?

(Mahizhvinai Padalam, 76)

The Lord's Mother is a virgin. She herself asked how it could be and the world has been asking the same qustion. Christian faith replies by a comparison. Like the ray of light that passes through a crystal and leaves the crystal untarnished, the Lord was really born of His Mother and still preserved her as a virgin.

வாய்ப்படா நுழை பளிங்கின் வாய்கதிர்
போய்ப்படா ஒளி படரும் போன்றுதாய்
நோய்ப்படா துஅருங் கன்னி நூக்கிலாது
ஆய்ப்படா வயத்து அமலன் தோன்றினுன்

(Mahavarul Padalam, 95)

The holy name of Jesus means "One who saves" and Beschi calls it in Tamil, "புரவலன் என்று ஒக்கும் நாமம்" (Kātchi Padalam, 93). The Lord who has no form and no name thus took a form and a name. "பேரே வரப் பிதற்றல் அல்லால் ஆரே அறிவார்..." sang the Alwars and Nayanmars and to the nameless One they give thousand names and inebriate themselves by singing them. And Christian bhaktas have found salvation by pronouncing the Holy name of Jesus. Of the efficacy of this name, Veeramamunivar sings:

பொய்யும் போவன, போவன பொருந்திய புரைகள்,
ஐயும் போவன, ஆகுலம் போவன, அலகை
மொய்யும் போவன, முதிர்ந்தநோய் போவன, மற்றும்
மையும் போவன வகுத்தஇத் திருப்பெயர் வயத்தால்.

(Kātchi Padalam, 97).

Beschi gives an explanation to why God became man.

செருவழி பொறிகள் ஐந்தும்
செகுத்துத்தன் நிலேயின் ஊக்கல்
அருவழி என்று, தானே
அங்கண்வான் இறங்கிப் பாரில்
கருவழி வந்த நாதன்
கலேமுதிர் சுருதி காட்ட
உருவழி தோன்றி, மாக்கள்
உறவுற மகனு னுனே.

(Mahizhvinai Padalam, 81).

The santham and the first line remind us of Appar's தடுத் திலேன் ஐவர் தம்மைத் தத்துவத்து உயர்வு நீர்மைப் படுத்திலேன் etc. Here we encounter the paradox of paradoxes that we cannot live a moral and supernatural life without the grace of God and yet we are responsible if we do not cooperate with it. Beschi here has only given expression to the Gospel that grace comes with Christ, the Incarnate Son of God whose delight it is to be with sons of men (உறவு உற).

Beschi describes the state of original sin or the collective sinfulness of the whole human race from which God had to redeem us. The effects of that sin of Adam are thus pictured in pathetic tones :

மாறு விடம்உண்டு அன்றுஅன்னுர்
வான்பேறு இழந்தே, வரம் இழந்தே,
தேனுர் அலர்க்கா இழந்தே, தாம்
சிந்தை பனிப்ப, நாமும்அழ
நாணு நஞ்சும் நல்குரவும்
நகவும் நோயும் கொடுங்கூற்றும்
காணுர் முள்ளும் கொல்விலங்கும்
கடிதுஇவ் உலகில் படர்ந்தனவே.

(Gñāpaga Padalam, 120).

The whole human race is thus groaning under what in Tamil we call கையறுநிலை or total helplessness to save itself. The initiative in the process of redemption and its completion have all to be God's own activity. St. Joseph is pictured as praying to God to show mercy to His children who have all gone astray:

தந்தை நோக உணர்வின்றித் தவருு நின்ற பிள்ளைகள் தம்
சிந்தை நோகப் பணிந்து அடுத்தால் சினந்த தாதை அகற்றுவனே?
நிந்தை யாகப் பிழைத்தெனினும் நினக்கோர் பிள்ளை ஆயஎமக்கு
எந்தை யாக நீஎன்றும் இரங்கா முனிவதாங்கொல்லோ?

(Tirumaṇa Padalam, 20).

Why should we suffer for the sin committed by the first man? This question makes Beschi express the vision of mankind as one organic living body where the good and evil of one member affects all the members.

வாயே உணும்நஞ்சு உறுப்பெல்லாம்
மருவி வருத்தும் வண்ணம்எனத்
தாயே தாதை கொண்டவினை
தனையராம்நாம் கொண்டுஅழுங்கத்
தீஏ வியதீ தொடுசனித்துத்
தெளியா உணர்வின் மனம்கலங்க
னோயே பால்உண்டு இடர்க்கரத்தின்
நுடங்க வினையின் விளைவுற்றோம்.

(Gñapaga Padalam).

Christianity is a religion of salvation. The Son-of-God-made-man conquers death by undergoing the cruel death on the cross and through this vicarious sacrifice gives a share in his resurrection to those who surrender to him in faith, hope and love. This great mystery of the Christian religion is embodied in genuine Tamil idiom in many places in Thembavani.

அழுதுஆர்ந்த துயர்க்கரத்தில் பிறந்துகைக்கும்
அரந்தையின்பால் அருந்திவளர்ந்து அருள்வளர்ந்த
பொழுது, ஆர்ந்த வஞ்சகத்தார் பகைசெய்துஆர்ப்பப்
பொறை ஏராய்ப் பூட்டிச்செம் புனல்சேருக
உழுது!ஆர்ந்த ஆர்வவிதை வித்திப்பின்னும்
உரியவரம் நீர் இறைத்து விளைந்தஇன்பம்
வழுதுஆர்ந்த வையகத்தார் உய்தற்குஈவான்
மணிக்கலத்தூடு அமுதேந்தும் அருள்மொய் மார்போன்.

This stanza in Kātchi Padalam shows how God became man, shed tears, suffered and died at the hands of evil men even though his only crime was to bring an increase of grace. He took the plough of patience to plough his own body in blood and sowed the seed of yearning for God and irrigated the field with special graces and produced a harvest of happiness which his heart brimming with grace offers to men for their salvation. We cannot do full justice by this paraphrasing to the simile Beschi has made by comparing the sacrificial salvific act of Christ to the agricultural activity common in Tamil Nadu.

The great majority of mankind have to find their salvation in the state of a householder. Veeramamunivar describes an ideal family thus :

மானமே வேலியாய், வகுத்த சொல்தரும்
ஞானமே தூதனுய், நயப்ப யாவரும்
தானமே தோழனுய், அறிவின் தன்மையால்
வானமே உறையுளாய் மடிவில் வாழுவார்.

(Īraram Poruttu Padalam, 26).

The combination of both the states of இல்லறம் and துறவறம் in one and the same family is a unique fact and St. Joseph ever conscious of this great mystery never fails to wonder at God's great mercies to him. For instance,

"... தந்தை நீ, தனிக் கன்னி தனயன் நீ,
எந்தை நீ என்னை என்றனையோ என்முன்"

(Soku Tholvi Padalam, 63).

These are the words which Beschi puts in the mouth of St. Joseph reflecting on Jesus calling him father.

The way to perdition is broad, but the way to immortality is narrow. This thought comes forcibly in Kunungu Mantira Padalam. Karōtaran is one of the devils consulted on the most efficient way of ensnaring men to perdition. And Karōtaran, reminiscent of C. S. Lewis' Screwtape Letters, advises:

மைமுகம் புதைத்த பொய்அறம் காட்டல்
வடுப்புகும் பெருந்தடம் (என்முன்).

In the next stanza (99), Beschi makes Karōtaran expatiate on the broad way thus:

நிறைதவிர் தீய கயவரும், நரகின்
நிலைதவிர்ந்து இன்பவீடு, உடலின்
சிறைதவிர் காலை, எய்தலும் விழைவார்;
செல்கதி எளிதெனக் காட்டி
முறைதவிர் அறங்கள் நம்புளி, தாமே
மூழ்கிய துகளின் ஆழ்ந்து அஞ்சா
மறைதவிர் அறத்தால் வீடுற உள்ளி
மாய்ந்துளரி நரகிடை வீழ்வார்.

To be forewarned is to be forearmed; hence these pieces of information about the machinations of the evil one.

Mystics ought to go through a writhing experience of the absence of God and attributing this loss to their own sin. This experience is common to mystics of all religions. It is the dark night of the soul. Tiruvasagam abounds with it. Now the loss of the divine Child at the age of 12 in Jerusalem where he stayed back in the temple without the parents knowing about it, gives Beschi the opportunity to put on the lips of Mary and Joseph the expression of this bitter experience of the dark night of the soul in Pirintha Mahavai Kān Padalam. We have given stanza 25 on p. 35. We may add:

புள்ளும் புலம்ப வண்டும்அழப் பூவும் நைய
விள்ளும் காவும் வினைகொண்டுள் மெலிந்துஇரங்கக்
கொள்ளும் துயரில் கண்டதெலாம் கொழுந்தவன்தான்
உள்ளும் தன்மைத்து உருகியழ வினவினனே. (37)
என்நெஞ்சு ஒப்ப இருபொழுதும் இருள் பொழிலே,
உன்நெஞ்சு ஒப்ப உயிரெல்லாம் நிழற்றிஅருள்
தன்நெஞ்சு ஒப்பத் தந்துஓம்பும் தயைப்பெருமான்
நின்நெஞ்சு ஒப்ப நிறுத்தினையேல் காட்டுஎன்றான். (40)

This takes us to the Neithal poems in Kuruntokai etc. In his bhakti stanzas Beschi's fervour flames up like Nammalwar's or Manickavasagar's. When Beschi pours out his heart in praise of God, His Son Jesus Christ and also the Virgin Mother of the Lord, a Tamilian is naturally reminded about Thevaram, Thiruvasagam and Nālāyira Divya Prabhandam.

அறக்கடல் நீயே; அருட்கடல் நீயே;
அருங்கருணாகரன் நீயே;
திறக்கடல் நீயே; திருக்கடல் நீயே;
திருந்துஉளம் ஒளிபட ஞான
நிறக்கடல் நீயே; நிகர்கடந்து உலகில்
நிலையும் நீ; உயிரும் நீ; நிலைநான்
பெறக்கடல் நீயே; தாயுநீ, எனக்குப்
பிதாவுநீ அனைத்துநீ அன்றோ?
ஒருநாதன் என்று, தனிஏக னின்றும்
ஒருமூவர் என்று பெயராய்க்
குருவாகி வந்து தணவாது அகன்று
குறுகாதும் எங்கும் உளனாய்ப்

பொருளாதி என்று பொருள்தோறும் நின்று
பொருளோடு அழிந்து சிதையா
அருவாகி நின்றும் உருவோய்இங்கு யாருன்
அருவீர ஆண்மை அறிவார்?

Such poems as these reflect not only the theological background of Beschi and show him as a man of God but also the fact that the bhakti literature Tamil enthralled the Italian missionary. His bhakti songs by reason of their sweetness, sonority and content equal the best in our Tamil religious poetry.

Beschi's following poem is yet another example:

களிவளர் தவத்தின் வீட்டில் காட்சிநன் னிலையில்ஞான
ஒளிவளர் கதவு சேர்த்தி ஒழுக்கநற் ருளைப் பூட்டி
அளிவளர் நெஞ்சின் மஞ்சத்து அன்புஅணை பரப்பினேமேல்
வெளிவளர் உயர்வான் வேந்தன் விழைந்துஉறைந்து எம்மை
[ஆள்வான்.

This, an exquisitely chiselled jewel of a poem occuring in Mahizhvinai Padalam, is full of sound Christian teaching from the first word களி to the last word ஆர்வான். Meanwhile this compares in santham with Appar's Tevaram:

உடம்பெனும் மனையகத்து உள்ளமே தகளி யாக
மடம்படும் உணர்நெய் யட்டி உயிரெனும் திரிமயக்கி
இடம்படும் ஞானத் தீயால் எரிகொள இருந்து நோக்கில்
கடம்பமர் காளை தாதை கழலடி காண லாமே.

In between theological explanations and narration of heroic deeds of great men, Beschi often inserts his own preachings connecting them with the doctrines and narrations. For instance, while we speak about the three great enemies of human nature, namely the world, the flesh and the devil as முப்பகை the three-fold enemy, Veeramamunivar speaks of நாற்பகை the four-fold enemy, including heresy as the fourth one. In Sinai Malai Kān Padalam, he sings:

"...மறையை
முருக்கிடப் பலமதத்தாரும்
கனைமுகத்து உலகும் அலகையும் உடலும்
கதத்தநாற் பகைகள்மொய்ப் பனவே."

The hero of an epic should be fearless and fight for dharma. Here our Veeramamunivar makes use of his imagination to create situations where his hero's courage and bravery can be portrayed. He creates sub-plots around fictitious characters. All the nine rasas of India are thus brought in and St. Joseph is portrayed as a zealous missionary and a great battle leader against the forces of evil. Job of old says: Is not man's life on earth a warfare? The disharmony and quarrels and wars that are witnessed all around us in the world between families, between communities, between nations, between every sort of groups seem to be but reflections of a terrible war in higher places between the forces of good and evil. In every religion we have this warfare depicted as vividly as possible. Now due to the missionary zeal of St. Joseph in Iravimapuram in Egypt, God is worshipped by the people as He ought to be and the forces of evil have hardly any scope to play their tricks there. And Satan calls a council of his demons to take stock of this state of affairs and plot his future course of action. Here Beschi's verses depict the machinations of evil and they are a study in the psychology of temptation. The meekest man on earth is depicted as waging a relentless war where battle descriptions from Ramayana or Mahabharata could be imitated by Beschi. But it is a spiritual combat in which the hero of Thembavani is engaged against Lucifer and all his minions. This brings to memory St. Paul's injunction: Put on the armour of faith.........or Manickavasagar's ஞானவாள் ஏந்துமையர்......... Hermits, anchorites, cenobites, ascetics and sannyasis are all warriors in the true sense of the word and not escapists from the world. Vāman, a warrior and confirmed sensualist created by Beschi's imagination is converted by the preaching of St. Joseph about retribution and life after death.

The rishis of Chitra Kudam after listening to St. Joseph's expositions of true asceticism get convinced and state their conviction in forceful language of new converts:

கோலமே வீணடா! குளித்தல் வீணடா!
சூலமே வீணடா! துறவு வீணடா!
காலமே மந்திரம் கதைத்தல் வீணடா!
சீலமே கெடுநசை செகுத்திலால் என்பார். (127)

This diction is in the tradition of Siddhars and the idea reminds us of Tirunavukkarasar's Tevaram:

"கங்கை ஆடில் என்? காவிரி ஆடில் என்?
கொங்கு தண்குமரித் துறை ஆடில் என்?
ஓங்கு மாகடல் ஓதநீர் ஆடில்என்?
எங்கும் ஈசன் எனுதவர்க்கு இல்லையே!"

The following stanza also teaches the truth that if our actions do not praise God but only His creatures then they are useless:

உற்ற கோலம் வீணடா ஒண் தவங்கள் வீணடா
கற்ற நூலும் வீணடா கைஉதாரம் வீணடா
பெற்ற பேறும் வீணடா பேரறங்கள் வீணடா
மற்ற யாவும் வீணடா மண்ணைப் போற்றலாலடா.

Here we can hear Thomas a Kempis' words of the "Imitation of Christ": "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity, except to serve God and to serve Him alone."

There are about 120 episodes of the Old Testament interwoven in this exquisite texture of an epic. But their rhythm and ring in Thembavani bring to our minds one or the other of the famous Tamil classics. Thus the Great Flood of Noah's time is described:

நீர்எழும் ஓதையும் நீர்பெய் ஓதையும்
கார்எழும் ஓதையும் கால்செய் ஓதையும்
சூர்எழும் ஓதையும் துதைந்து வீழ்மலை
பேர்எழும் ஓதையும் பெருகி மாறுமால்.

(Ilaval Mātchi Padalam, 104).

We can surely hear the sounds of Chilappatikaram here. And again stanza 107 reminds us of Ārrupadalam of Kambar:

கவிகையும் கொடிகளும் கதிர்செய் மஞ்சமும்
சிவிகையும் தளிமமும் திவழ்ந்த கோசிகக்
குவிகையும் குஞ்சமும் கோல வட்டமும்
புவிகையுண் பெருக்கொடு போகக் காண்பரே.

In Kamban's words, the festive sounds of Ayodya ring in our ears as:

வளையொலி வயிரொலி மகர வீணையின்
கிளையொலி முழவொலி கின்னரத்தொலி
துளையொலி பல்லியம் துவைக்கும் சும்மையின்
விளையொலி கடலொலி மெலிய விம்முமே.

(Nagara Padalam, 154).

And Beschi makes such festivity resound in our ears at the espousals of Mary and Joseph:

முடுகு முரசொலி முடுகு முழவொலி
　　முடுகு முருடொலி முடிவிலாக்
கடுகு பறையொலி கடுகு கலமொலி
　　கடுகு கடமொலி கனிவெழாத்
தொடுகு குழலொலி தொடுகு குரலொலி
　　தொடுகு துதியொலி தொடுதலால்
படுகு முகிலொலி படுகு கடலொலி
　　படுதலில மணமாயதே.

(Thirumana Padalam, 119).

Whereas for Kamban the festive sounds drown the roar of the ocean, for Beschi they drown the clap of thunder too.

Kamban's description of Rama breaking the Siva dhanu is well known:

தடுத்திமை யாமல் இருந்தவர் தாளின்
மடுத்ததும் நாண் நுதி வைத்ததும் நோக்கார்
கடுப்பினில் யாரும் அறிந்திலர் கையால்
எடுத்தது கண்டனர் இற்றது கேட்டார்.

(Karmuga Padalam, 775).

Beschi seems to have lost his heart to this stanza. Young handsome David facing the fully armed Goliath presents itself as the apt situation for Beschi to create a similar verse and here it is:

கல்லை ஏற்றலும் கவணினைச் சுழற்றலும், அக்கல்
ஒல்லை ஓட்டலும் ஒருவரும் காண்கிலர், இடிக்கும்
செல்லை ஒத்தன சிலைநுதல் பாய்தலும் அன்னான்
எல்லை பாய்ந்துஇருள் இரிந்தென வீழ்தலும் கண்டார்.

(Valan Sanitha Padalam, 29).

உவப்பத் தலைக்கூடி உள்ளப் பிரிதல் is how Tirukkural describes the meeting and parting of men of culture. But the poor shepherds of Bethlehem had cultivated their mind and heart and when they met the Child in the manger of Bethlehem, their hearts were pinned to Him and if they left they went away leaving their hearts behind. In the words of Beschi:

ஏவ லாகி மூவரை இறைஞ்சி ஏங்கி ஏகினர்
ஆவ லாகி ஆங்கு வைத்தஆவி யல்லது இல்லதால்
மேவ லாகி ஆவி யாக வேய்ந்த அன்பு இலாதெனின்
ஓவலாகி வெற்றுடல்கள் ஊரை உற்றல் ஒத்ததே.

(Kātchi Padalam, 13).

The shepherds have melted their whole soul into a yearning for the joy of looking at the Child. And therefore they will be just dead bodies going back to their village but for the fact that there has been established a relationship of love with the Child which is now their spirit.

Subramania Bharathi sang that the great fame of Tamil Nadu lies in its giving to the world a poet like Tiruvalluvar:

வள்ளுவன் தன்னை உலகினுக்கே தந்து
வான்புகழ் கொண்ட தமிழ்நாடு.

We have to remember that it was Veeramamunivar who introduced Valluvar to the whole world by translating him in Latin poetry, at a time when Valluvar was not translated even in any Indian languages. Beschi had a great respect for Valluvar; he compares Tirukural to a great star in a dark night. It is no wonder Thiruvalluvar finds himself enshrined in a score of places in Thembavani. Just one example will do here to indicate Beschi's deep appreciation of Thiruvalluvar. Wc all know the kural,

அன்பிலார் எல்லாம் தமக்குரியர், அன்புடையார்
என்பும் உரியர் பிறர்க்கு.

And in Thembavani we read:

அன்புடையர் என்பும் அரிந்தளிப்பார் தன்னுயிரோடு
என்புடைய மெய்யெல்லாம் ஈந்துஉணவுஎன் பான் யாரோ?
ஈந்துணவென்று எவ்வுயிர்க்கும் எவ்வுணவும் ஈட்டிஇவண்
வேய்ந்துஉணத் தான் ஊண் இரந்த நீயல்லால் வேறுயாரே?

This is put in the mouth of St. Joseph as he hears Jusus telling him how He has come down as food from heaven in order to give His own body and blood to all for their spiritual nourishment. We may quote just one more verse from Thembavani wherein Thiruvalluvar has come handy to Beschi.

உடைக்கலத்து இலங்கிச் செற்றத்து
உடன்இருள் பருகும் நெஞ்சான்
(i.e. the Pharoah of Egypt)
அடைக்கலத்து அடைந்த யூதர்க்கு
அடிமைஎன்று இயற்றும் பீழை
துடைக்கல்அற்று எவரும் அஞ்சித்
தொறும் தொறும் அழுத கண்ணீர்
படைக்கலத் தொகுதி போலப்
பைதிரம் சிதைத்தது அன்றே.
(Ilaval Mātchi Padalam, 23).

Needless to say that Beschi has incorporated the kural,

அல்லற்பட்டு ஆற்றுது அழுதகண் ணீரன்றே
செல்வத்தைத் தேய்க்கும் படை.

Beschi seems to have had a great liking for Civaka Cintamani. The verses of this epic have found their echoes in quite a number of places in Thembavani. For instance, Palestine is, in Biblical language, a land flowing with milk and honey, an idiom not dissimilar to that used in Tamil from time immemorial. Now Thiruttakadevar describes Emangatha Nadu thus:

காய்மாண்ட தெங்கின் பழம்வீழக் கமுகின் நெற்றிப்
பூமாண்ட தீந்தேன் தொடைகீறி வருக்கை போழ்ந்து
தேமாங் கனிசிதறி வாழைப் பழங்கள் சிந்தும்
ஏமாங் கதம்என்று இசையால் திசைபோ யதுண்டே.

From the high coconut palm falls a nice big nut and on its way down hits the honey-filled flowers and fruits of less high trees like royal palms, mango and plantain, thus showing the fertility of the soil. Beschi copies this poetic device to indicate how fertile the land of his hero was. In his Nattupadalam, verse 33 runs thus;

பாய்ந்த தேங்கதின் பழங்கள் வீழ்தலால்
வாய்ந்த வாழைமா வருக்கை ஆசினி
சாய்ந்த தீங்கனி சரிந்த தேன் புனல்
தோய்ந்த வாயெலாம் இனிமை தோய்ந்தன.

Here we see the difference as well as the similarity in the verses. At certain places Beschi simply takes the same lines from Civaka Cintamani to suit his own needs. For instance, Beschi, in describing paddy fields, says how the stalks stand up proudly with their newly formed green grains like upstarts and how they mature and bow down like men of good learning:

சொல்லரும் சூல்பசும் பாம்பின் தோற்றம்போல்
மெல்லவே கருவிருந்து ஈன்று, மேலலார்
செல்வமே போல்தலை நிறுவித் தேர்ந்தநூற்
கல்விசேர் மாந்தரின் இறைஞ்சிக் காய்த்தவே.

The last two lines here are exactly the same as found in one of the poems in Nāmagal Ilambagam of Civaka Cintamani.

The immortal Ilango had taken bodily several of the folk songs of his time and incorporated them in his unparallelled gem of an epic, according to the needs of his theme. We still relish these so called vari Padals every time we read them. Naturally Beschi has been enthralled by them and so he has composed his own vari Padals to suit several situations in his epic.

பாற்கடல்என் உள்ளப் பதும மலர்அரும்ப
நூற்கடலே நீஉதித்தாய் நும்மலர்க்கண் முத்துஅரும்ப!
நும்மலர்க்கண் முத்தரும்ப நோய்செய் வினைசெய்தோம்;
எம்மலர்க்கண் முத்தரும்ப இன்று வினைதீர்த்தாய்!

So sings St. Joseph praising the Child Jesus. Ilango's vari Padals have shown the way to Beschi here. The pearls of tears in the third line in the poem above refer to tears of pain. And the same phrase in the last line refer to tears of joy. Such poems of exquisite beauty patterned after Ilango's vari Padals are to be found in Thembavani's Nattupadalam also.

Veeramamunivar's sense of humour is well known through his prose work Paramartha Guru Kathai. This sense of humour is

also sparkling in his epic, especially when he describes controversies. For instance, look at this verse in Chitira Kuda Padalam (No. 124):

"சடைவளர் உருக்கொடு தவிர்கில் நீர்குளித்து
அடைவளர் வனத்திடை அகன்றிலாத் திரிந்து
இடைவளர் கனிகளோடு இளம்கிழங்கு உணும்
முடைவளர் கரடிகள் முனிவரோ?" என்பார்.

If external observances like having long hair, regular bath, living in forests and eating only fruits and tubers are the mark of rishis, then bears and wild boars may be called rishis! It is also interesting to note that such a criticism of attachment to mere external observances is put in the mouth of those who are convinced after listening to St. Joseph delineating the essentials of true asceticism.

Beschi calls God "Sivam Mali Thani Muthalē" (சிவம் மலி தனி முதலே) and "Thiruvilaiyattu-t-thēvanē". We have mentioned the soteriological myths like Vishapakarana Murti. Beschi is captivated by this particular story so much that he uses the hallowed words in a line: Ālamē amuthu ākiya pānmaiyāl (Kuzhavigal Vathai Padalam, 9). Thus wherever he sees a lovely Tamil word, or a melodious sonorous combination of words, wherever he meets phrases or lines rich in meaning or arresting figures of speech, he cannot but take them into his verses to adorn his characters or embellish situations.

Kālan is taken as a figure of speech by Beschi and thus used: Kālan ēnthiya vāl. But vithi or ūzh is not a figure of speech in the usages of a Tamilian. It is entwined with the theory of transmigration of souls. Now Beschi who refutes this theory nevertheless makes use of the words vithi and ūzh in meanings quite consistent with Christianity. In his usage vithi stands for God's will and ūzh vinai for original sin. It is interesting to note here how he has observed the common colloquial usage of the phrase ūzh vinai; for it is often used by our illiterate people as ūzhi vinai. Here is a great example for modern Christian thinkers and theologians and poets.

Thembavani consists of three Parts (Kandams), each Part divided into 12 chapters (Padalams), and having 3615 stanzas in all. The poems are of the variety called virutham. We are told that while in his 12,000 stanzas Kamban uses 87 variations of santham, Veeramamunivar has used 90 variations in his 3615 stanzas.[3] Thiru Pooranalingam Pillai has put Thembavani on a par with Civaka Cintamani. Dr. U. V. Swaminatha Iyer and many other great savants and scholars have showered copious praises on Beschi and Thembavani.

We can classify the stanzas of Thembavani into three groups. The difficult and terse stanzas were most probably written at a time when Beschi began studying Tamil prosody. He must have tried his hand at composing every form of poetry he came across in the great classics of Tamil. That must also have been the time when he began compiling his dictionaries and writing his grammars, so that rare usage or common, obsolete meanings or current, must have all sounded equally valid and sweet to his ears and he must have been captivated by the richness of the vocabulary of the language. Secondly, there are many passages where he tries to teach doctrines too recondite to be put into an easy flowing poem. And here it is good to remember that clarity can be defined in two ways. We say a passage is clear when we understand easily what it says at the first reading. This is the common understanding of the term clarity. But an author who tries to make every thing crystal clear is most likely to have omitted the deeper aspects for the sake of clarity so much so that, in the process, he enunciates only half truths. The second understanding of clarity is that the formulation fully expresses through the most suitable vacabulary, albeit not readily, what the writer wishes to convey. In this second meaning, even those terse stanzas of Beschi do possess clarity expressing in the most apt words the profundity of his thought and experience. This observation on clari y is not intended to suggest that a fully formulated verse should always be difficult to reid or understand at once. Great masters have always tried to express profound experiences

3. J. A. Sundaram.

in a simple way. Thirdly, we have a vast number of easy flowing verses with soul-stirring unction coming straight from Veeramamunivar's heart. This is especially true when he or his characters speak to or praise God.

Having incorporated a large number of Biblical episodes, Beschi finds it necessary to Tamilise foreign names. Following the well-known rules of grammar for using loan words of foreign languages, Beschi makes Jacob Sakopu, Armenia Arumēni, Sodom Sothuma Nadu, Gideon Sethaiyon, Samson Sanjone, Philistines Pilitheyar, Sinai Seenayi, Sodomites Sothumathar, Joshua Sosuvan, Bersabi Pētchapai, Elias Eliya Munivan, Egypt Esithu, Sennacherib Sinakaran, Nabuchodonosor Nabukōn, Gaul Galliam and so on and so forth. They sound melodious in his poems. He has also used another technique in introducing his characters. In this he has only followed de Nobili by translating into Tamil the meanings of those proper names. Thus Joseph, the hero of the epic, becomes Valan, although he takes a different Tamil root to translate the same name of Joseph, the Patriarch of the Old Testament, which he renders as Āṉaran; for Āṉar like Valan means fullness, prosperity and goodness. (Cf. An Etymological Lexicon of the Tamil language, Vol. I by Nallur Gnanaprakasar O.M.I.). The word Adam comes from the Hebrew word Adamah which means both earth and man formed from the earth. Thus we find Beschi calling Adam Maṇṇan (மண்ணன்). John the Baptist is translated as Karunaiyan to distinguish him from Arulappan, the apostle John. Beschi is also an adept in creating fictitious characters and giving them legendary names like Kānthari, Vāman, Sivāsivan. His usage of certain Tamil words is daring indeed. For instance, he uses the word virali meaning a 16 year old maiden for the Virgin Mary and Nēyan for the Holy Spirit.

We have seen how the great Christian mysteries were tried to be indicated in Tamil, first by transliterating the Portuguese or Latin words and then by coining new phrases of a Manipravala style. But Beschi went a step further by daringly using chaste Tamil words and phrases. Thus Deva Arul Pozhi Neerādal indicates baptism; Āṇmai Sei Thiru Nei Poosal indicates Confirmation;

Virunthu stands for Eucharist; Deva Murai means, in Beschi's hand, the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Thus he has shown the way for future Tamil Catholic poets, theologians and writers to express the great truths of their religion in Tamil.

It is also just and fair to point out certain difficulties in reading and understanding Beschi's poems, especially Thembavani and Thirukavalur Kalambagam. The first difficulty is regarding the usage of certain words and phrases. What has to be thozhēl (தொழேல்) is written by Beschi as Thozhuthēl. I do not know if he had any precedents either in written or spoken usage of Tamil for such erroneous use. Similarly he uses the phrase Ovvā Kanni (ஒவ்வாக் கன்னி) for oppila kanni (ஒப்பிலாக் கன்னி). Grammatical mistakes like மகளிர் ஆடும் are also to be found in Thembavani. Nuṉi becomes nuṇi even when he makes use of the well-known kural; his line (as it stands) is நுணிக் கொம்பினும் ஊக்கினர் நொந்து இறப்பார். தண்டனை (thandanai) is spelt as தெண்டனை (thendanai). Very often the word Arasi (queen) is used by him as Arasāl (அரசாள்) when it is applied to the Virgin Mary. This usage of the word for queen is later fully accepted by Tamil Catholic hymnists. Moreover, Beschi freely makes use of the latitude given by grammarians to poets in the use of words—விகாரம்—so much so one often wonders whether it does not amount to a misuse. These and such other uncommon usages and mistakes are sure proof of the authenticity for the authorship of Thembavani. Only a foreigner could have so boldly written.

While on the subject of the authenticity of Thembavani, we may make one more observation to confirm Beschi's authorship of the epic and other books like Thirukavalur Kalambagam. We refer to the rich and profound Christian theology which is crammed into stanza after stanza in these books. Beschi has clearly been at pains to express all the richness of the doctrines he essays in these passages; for he has simply joined root words to root words to coin phrases in order that they might do justice to the expression of the profound ideas he had in mind. This clearly shows that the author could not be but a Christian theologian as well as mystic and poet. Another contributory cause that makes many of Beschi's

poems rather very difficult to read is his use of obsolete words and terse crammed expressions. Perhaps we can say that his use of obsolete words is a contribution to the growth of Tamil itself. For there is no justification why flamboyant foreign words should push out of usage ancient, short, pure and expressive Tamil words of the same meaning. Beschi the compiler of Tamil dictionary knew well these words and he brought back some of them into use—e.g. cell (செல்) for cloud; gnemunga (ஞெமுங்க) for pressing down. The terseness of his expressions we can attribute to his European background.

The intricate scholastic theological explanations are interwoven with stanzas that narrate Biblical events and episodes. For the sake of these narrations he seems to display an indifference to the geographic formation of Palestine. Thus, for example, the Holy Family while fleeing to Egypt from Jerusalem is said to be passing through the land of the ancient Sodomites, then to Jericho and other places where Joshua had fought his victorious battles, then to the battle grounds of Gideon, then to Gaza where Samson played his pranks, and then on to Mount Sinai. It is amusing for us that such a round about journey was undertaken making a big circle around Jerusalem. But what is foremost in the mind of Beschi is to somehow worm these stories into the epic so that he could bring out the lessons they teach. Very often he ends each narration by saying that it is the same Lord who manifested His wisdom in such and such ways that is now come as a Babe in the arms of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph. This also reminds us of similar reminiscences in Kamba Ramayanam, e.g. தோய்ந்தும் பொருளனைத்தும்...(சரபங்கன் பிறப்பு நீங்கு படலம்).

Beschi also shows an indifference to the flora and fauna of Palestine. For he was writing for Tamilians and he himself had become a Tamilian in taste and appreciation. That is why his epic, as we have already pointed out, sounds utterly natural to Tamilians in atmosphere, background and names. Therefore Dr. Caldwell's criticism that Beschi falsified the geography of Jerusalem is pointless.

Dr. Caldwell's assessment of Beschi's place in Tamil literature is also open to question. For he says Beschi can be assigned a place of "the first rank among the Tamil poets of the second class". The first class according to him "comprises only three or at the utmost four works—the Kural, the Cintamani, the Ramayanam and Naladiyar". Dr. Caldwell has not considered the genuine Tamil poetry or the lyrical gems in the Sangam collections both of Aham and Puram—unsurpassed for the beauty of form, and exquisite revelation of every kind of human emotion and experience. No moral aphorisms like Kural or Naladiyar can measure up to such heights of poetry as these. Along with Sangam classics stands Cilapathikaram, the unparalleled gem of Tamil epic by its dramatic structure, its simplicity, directness and emotional glow. It stands far above Cintamani and also above Kamban's Ramayanam. The latter, it is true, possesses the characteristics of great poetry but it is overwrought and lacks the restraint of Cilapathikaram which gives it its bewitching beauty and sweet mellifluous flow of language.

We can safely say Beschi's poetry challenges comparison to any poet subsequent to Sangam epoch and surpasses the elegant versifications of various puranas. We can certainly say his creations are the best that any man ever wrote in a foreign language.

Prof. Thomas Srinivasan wrote as early as 1935 complaining that justice had not yet been done to Beschi. He wrote, "The Tamil world where art and poetry have always been the handmaids of religion has no excuse for its scant recognition of the work of one who loved it so sincerely and served it so diligently...Tamil Catholics will have the least excuse of all if they fail to appreciate him...one who covered their religion with glory in the eyes of their countrymen and enshrined in forms of lasting beauty the truths by which they live. Only by entering into his great legacy, by enriching and carrying it forward, will they be able to vindicate their religion and their capacity for culture. Thus alone will the literature of India be enriched with gifts that are at once Catholic and Indian." (Cf. New Review, 1935, Vol. II, pp. 121–128; 260–270).

Lecture III

CHRIST TO TAMIL AND TAMIL TO CHRIST

Beschi's contemporaries and successors contributed their mite to increase the Catholic Tamil literature. Charles M. Bartoldi (+1740) left us Gnana Muyarchi, which contains 24 meditations of the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyala. John Maynard (+1717) wrote Anithiya Nittiya Vittiyasam, which supplied spiritual reading even in our days as boys. James T. Rossi (+1774) who is still venerated as Sinna Savariyar left three volumes of the lives of Saints mostly taken from the Breviary and seven volumes of miraculous events called, in Tamil, Kizhamai Pudumaigal, each volume for one day of the week.

Among the non-Jesuit writers, we must mention Jacomé Gonçalez (1676–1742), a Goan Konkani Brahmin who became Superior of the Indian Oratorians in Ceylon. Besides writing in Sinhalese, it is reported that he wrote Puranthima Pachima Kandam in Tamil, a history of the Old Testament, and a Commentary on the Gospels and several smaller works like Sugirtha Darpanam, Arputha Varalaru, Gnana Unarchi, Sugirtha Kural etc. He brought a lot of Sanskrit and Pali words into these Tamil works. He is also said to have composed several hymns for use in churches, using Tirai Virutham (Kaṭṭiyam), Ānanda Kalippu, Sindupatham etc.

Antony Kutty Annaviyar, a layman of Tuticorin, is said to have been a contemporary of Beschi. His songs Aradanai Pragasam and Arul Vasagam have come into our hands. It is found there that he wrote besides Pērinba Kāthal, Bāladhyanam, Pachāthāpam, Āpathuppattu, Āsaippathu, Gnāna Tiruppugazh, Ānanda Manjari, Annaiyin Pralāpa Vaṇṇam and a Parani on the Passion of the Lord Jesus.

Then happened the great hiatus in this mutually enriching intercourse of Tamil culture and Christian religion, viz. the expulsion of the Jesuits from Portuguese colonies followed by the suppression

of the Order itself by Pope Clement XIV in 1773. In the absence of the Jesuit missionaries and the dearth of other priests to cater to their spiritual needs, the Catholics had recourse to reading frequently the books they had left. Beschi's works were venerated as sacred relics by certain families that possessed them. The Society of Jesus was restored by Pope Pius VII in 1814 and the French Jesuits arrived in 1838. Before they arrived God gifted to the starved Tamil Nadu Church a Tamil poet who is only second to Beschi.

A family at Kulathur near Tiruchirapalli from a lineage that had the right of crowning the Chola Kings had been converted to Christianity under circumstances similar to the conversion of Vageesar who became Tirunavukkarasar or Appar. In this family Vedanayagam was born in 1826. He was a born poet, deeply devout and religious, with a voracious appetite for knowledge and a prodigious capacity for learning and writing. At the age of 11, he went to Tiruchirapalli to learn both English and Tamil from Thyaga Pillai, a court translator. At the age of 22, he was appointed the Records Keeper of the court and at 24 he became the translator himself. In 1857 at the age of 31, he was one of the three successful candidates for the judge's post, out of 70 competitors. Vedanayagam Pillai was the first Indian to be appointed as District Munsif. He started in Tranquebar in 1857, then was moved to Sirgazhi and then to Mayuram where he remained till retirement in 1873. Having passed his 30th year when the Indian Universities were inaugurated, he was a fully self-made man. But with his command of Latin, French, English and Tamil and his prodigious capacity to learn and write, he might have been expected to rise higher. But his keen sense of justice, his clear conscience that could detect and keep off from corruption, his heart that melted at the sight of the poor and the oppressed, his head that was unbending before arrogant corrupt authority were not recommendations for successful climbing and he retired to be remembered forever as Mayuram Munsif Vedanayagar. He was a serene and contented man free from all tensions since his faith and hope were deeply rooted in the Veda Nayagan whom he worshipped in every one of his songs and hymns.

The most signalizing trait of this great Catholic was the new dimension of dialogue which he introduced in the relationship between Hindus and Christians, a hundred years before good Pope John XXIII opened the doors and windows of the Church to the world, its religions and cultures. Even the great missionaries like de Nobili and Beschi, inspite of their great admiration for Tamil and Tamil culture, could not shed their Counter-Reformation mentality. Their controversial writings sometimes make sour reading. Vedanayagam Pillai could hit hard at corruption and superstition and yet win the affection and appreciation of all.

Love of Tamil served as the medium of Hindu—Christian symbiosis. It was this that made him strike such a deep friendship with the Adhina Kartha of Tiruvaduthurai Mutt Sri-la Sri Subramania Desigar.

வானென்று உதவவரும் சுப்ரமண்ய வரோதயனே
தானென்று வெண் நரன் பாடை இங்நாட்டில் தலையெடுக்க
ஏனென்று கேட்பவர் இல்லாத் தமிழை இனிதளிக்க
நானென்று கங்கணம் கட்டிக்கொண்டாய் இந்த நானிலத்தே.

His oft quoted letter in verse after their meeting bears repetition :

சூர் வந்து வணங்கு மேன்மை சுப்பிரமணியதேவே
நேர்வந்து நின்னைக்கண்டு நேற்று ராத்திரியே மீண்டேன்
ஊர்வந்து சேர்ந்தேன் என்றன் உளம் வந்து சேரக் காணேன்
ஆர்வந்து சொலினும் கேளேன் அதனை இங்கு அனுப்புவாயே.

It brings to our mind Beschi's description of the shepherds' visit to the Babe of Bethlehem. Vedanayagar's appreciation of C. V. Damodarampillai of Jaffna came out in stanzas like the following :

நள்ளுநர்க்கு இனிய தாமோதர ராதிபன்தான் நாளும்
தெள்ளு தண் தமிழால் செய்யும் தீங்கனி அமுதம் தன்னைக்
கொள்ளுவோர் செவி தித்திக்கும் கூறுவோர் வாய் தித்திக்கும்
உள்ளுவோர் மனம் தித்திக்கும் என்னில் யாம் உரைப்ப தென்னே.

It was not surprising that Damodaram Pillai who was not too fond of Christianity appreciated Vedanayagar and expressed his desire to inebriate himself with his hymns.

Arumuga Navalar of Jaffna, Ashtavadanam Poovai Kalyanasundara Mudaliyar, and Aranvayal Venkata Subba Pillai cultivated his friendship. It is well known how Vedanayagar befriended Gopalakrishna Bharati when his own community ostracized him for not upholding caste distinctions. It was but natural that Vedanayagar would become deeply attached to Maha Vidwan Meenakshisundarampillai of Tiruchirapalli. Several instances of intimate friendship are given.

When Vedanayagar was Munsif in Sirkazhi, he was asked to preside over the arangerram of Meenakshisundaram Pillai's Sirkazhi Kovai in the Valampuri Mandapam of the Siva temple of the place. The following verse is a typical example of the freedom he felt and enjoyed amidst Hindu friends and in Hindu lore. He asserts that he is the Munsif of Sirkazhi and serves summons to Lord Siva to appear before him as witness and declare the whole truth and nothing but the truth whether amidst the heaps of hymns he had received from other poets he had any praise equal in beauty to this Kovai of Meenakshisundaram Pillai.

விதி எதிரில் அரிமுதலோர் புகல் புகலி ஈசரே விண்ணோர் மண்ணோர்
துதி பொதிபல் பாமாலை பெற்றிருப்பீர் மீனாட்சி சுந்தரப்பேர்
மதி முதியன் கோவையைப்போல் பெற்றீர்கொல் இக்காழி வைப்பின் நீதி
அதிபதி நாம் என அறிவீர் நம்முன்னே சத்தியமாய் அறைகுவீரே.

If he could speak to Lord Siva in this fashion and win the love and affection of the best hearted Hindu savants we can judge the value of Hindu—Christian live—together.

He was so friendly with Hindus by his identification with Hindu culture that he spontaneously took such liberty as to sing the following stanza:

ஊன் தூக்கி உண்ணும் பிராமணர்க்(கு) அஞ்சி உமாபதியும்
மான் தூக்கினன் கையில், வேலன் தூக்கினன் வாரணத்தை
மீன் தூக்கினன் கொடியாக உருவிலி மேடமது
தான் தூக்கவே அதில் ஏறிக்கொண்டான் அந்த சண்முகனே.

Meenakshisundaram Pillai sang the Kulattur Kovai of 438 stanzas in honour of Vedanayagar. It was an Aintinai Kovai published in 1858, according to Dr. U. V. Swaminatha Iyer.

When in 1859, Vedanayagar published his Neethi Nul fifty six Tamil poets including Vadalur Vallalar Ramalinga Swamigal honoured it with their Sattu Kavis. At a time when inter–religious wars and intra–religious sectarian battles made daily news, it is exhilarating to find this Tamil poet and savant in the centre of a vortex of Tamil love and Tamil culture. It has a poignant lesson to teach the Catholic community of India today.

Vedanayagar's heroic efforts in organizing relief measures during the three years of famine (1876 foll.) really prodded government departments, heads of Mutts and Church agencies to bestir themselves to pool in all the resources they could muster. This stirred Gopalakrishna Bharati out of his resolve never to sing any human being's praise and made him sing:

நீயே புருஷ மேரு — உலகில்
நிலைத்தது நின் பேரு — நீதிபதி
ஆயிரம் ஆயினும் மாயூரம் ஆமோ
ஐய! நின் பெருமையை அளந்திடப் போமோ?
இயல் இசையுடன் கலை எல்லவும் ஆர்ந்தாய்;
ஏழை மக்கள் உறவே இனிதெனத் தேர்ந்தாய்;
மயலறும் சமரச மார்க்கமும் சார்ந்தாய்;
வளர் வேத நாயக மலரென நேர்ந்தாய்.

The agony in Vedanayagar's heart at the sight of the havoc wrought by this famine pours itself out in heart-rending hymns addressed to God:

பஞ்சம் தீர் ஐயா! — உனையன்றித்
தஞ்சம் யார் ஐயா? — சுவாமி
ஊரும் இல்லாமல் —குடிக்கத் தண் ணீரும் இல்லாமல்
அன்ன மெனும் பேரும் இல்லாமல்—பசி தீர்க்க ஆரும் இல்லாமல்
தாரங்களையே புருஷர் கைவிட்டார்
தந்தை தாய் பிள்ளைகளை விலை யிட்டார்

வேரும் இலையும் கிழங்கும் சாப் பிட்டார்
வெறுங் கையராய் வெளியே புறப்பட்டார்
தோலும் எலும்புமாய்த் தோன்றியே சோம்பினூர்
பாலரும் தாய் முலைப் பாலற்றுத் தேம்பினூர்—பஞ்சம்...

Vedanayagam Pillai was a student of politics and a social reformer of a very high rank. He laboured for adult and women's education. He fought against turning law courts into comic opera stages. He faught against bribery and every sort of corruption.

Neethinul that appeared two years after he became District Munsif is a work of six hundred stanzas. It collected the wise injunctions to be found in the Bible and foreign and Tamil literature. It deals with family and social relationships, service for the country, education, government etc. etc.

நெல்லறுக்க ஓர் காலம் மலர்கள் கொய்ய ஓர் காலம் நெடிய பாரக்
கல்லறுக்க ஓர்காலம் மரமறுக்க ஓர்காலக் கணக்கும் உண்டு
வல்லரக்கன் அனைய நமன் தானிணைத்த போதெல்லாம் வாழ்நாள்
[என்னும்
புல்லறுக்க வருவன் எனில் நெஞ்சகமே மற்றினியான் புகல்வதென்னே.

Its ideas are like those of the Book of Wisdom. But what mellifluous Tamil flow! And his prayer was:

நானே பொதுநீதிதானே செலுத்திட நல்லவரம் அருள்கோனே
தருமதேவதை ஞாய ஸ்தலந்தனில் நடிக்கத் தப்பு சாட்சிகள்
[கிடுகிடெனவே துடிக்க
இருமை அகல் அநீதியே ஓட்டம் பிடிக்க
இலஞ்சம் வாங்கிகள் வெட்கத்தால் உயிர் மடிக்க — நானே...

His Penmathimalai appeared in 1869 to be followed by Penkalvi and Penmanam. He addresses his two daughters and speaks to all Tamil daughters:

மதியிது மதியிது பெண்ணே—புண்ய
வதியல்லவோ நல்ல மகராசி கண்ணே
ஜெபமின்றி நீ படுக்காதே—நாளும்
ஜெபமின்றி நீ ஒரு வேலை தொடுக்காதே.
ஞான குரு உபதேசம்—இல்லா
ஈனருக் கில்லை என்றும் ப்ரகாசம்

எத்தனைபேர் புவி ஆண்டார்—முன்னம்
அத்தனை பேர்களும் ஐயோ மாண்டார்
பூமியே நாடக சாலை—இதில்
சாமி தந்தாரே சகலர்க்கும் வேலை.

அகங்காரம் மோகம் உலோபம் - பகை
மிகுங்காமம் பெருண்டி சோம்புதல் பாபம்........
அருமையாய் நான் பெற்ற மாதே—வாழ்த்து
திருவேத நாயகன் சேவடிப் போதே!

It is in this connection that we should mention his prose writings. Vedanayagar is the father of Tamil novel. His Prataba Mudaliar which appeared in 1876 and his Suguna Sundari coming out in 1877 were modelled on the Victorian English prose writings like those of Macaulay, in their architechtonic arrangement, the structure of their chapters and the composition of paragraphs. They trained their readers in logical thinking and composition.

The late Mr. A. V. Subramania Aiyar has this criticism about Prataba Mudaliar Caritram :

"Judged by standards of modern literary criticism, the work has some flaws......There is not much by way of a well-laid plot unravelling itself or subtleties of characterisation. But this aspect does not detract from the value of the work which is of absorbing interest. The frequent digressions and minor tales which add to the didactic element in the work smoothly fit into the general story." (Tamil Studies, second series pp. 83–84).

Vedanayagam Pillai was also one of the pioneer writers on law in Tamil. His Siddhanta Sangraham which appeared in 1862 is said to have been of immense use to the people who did not know English.

All these prose and poetic writings of Vedanayagam Pillai were also great tools of social reform and moral rearmament. Actually this representative of the Judiciary of the British Government was the first sower of the seed of total revolutions.

As Dr. M. Arokiaswami points out (Deva Thothira Malai: A metrical translation p. 12), "He spoke of Tamil and even of linguistic states which have come to stay now. He spoke of

Tamil being used as a court language as early as 1875 and spoke of political independence at least a decade before the Indian National Congress came into being." Nearly a century ago he spoke about socialism and equal enjoyment of property. All this was spiced with an irrepressible wit and an infectious sense of humour which make his prose and poetic works things of beauty and joy for ever.

As a lad of fifteen he had sung Nalungu song during wedding festivities:

பழங் கூழ் உமக்குப் பாலுடன் சோறு
பயப்படாதிரும் உமக்கு ஆயுசு நூறு
மைத்துனரே........................

The same sense of humour accompanied him to his old age and retirement:

கடுக்கன் இல்லாவிட்டால் காது கேளாதோ?
உடுப்புகள் இல்லாவிட்டால் உடம்பு நீளாதோ?
வெறுங்கழுத்தாயிருந்தால் விக்குமோ தொண்டை?
உறுந்தலை அணிபோனால் உடையுமோ மண்டை?
மண்டலத்தில் நமக்கு வயிறொரு குதிரா?
கண்டபடி உண்ண நாம் கபந்தனுக் கெதிரா?

We have already given other samples above which manifested his sense of humour.

With this wit and humour which were natural to him he poured out poetry because it was an irrepressible urge in him.

Thus Vedanayagar served a varied meal of nourishing food in prose and poetry to every stratum of the population in Tamil Nadu.

What Tamil Nadu knows better is Vedanayagar's Sarva Samaya Samarasa Keerthanaigal published in 1878. It begins in raga Deva Kanthari with these fine words;

எக்காலமும் உந்தன் பொற்கால் பணிந்துகொண்டிருக்க
நீ வரம் அருள்வாய்

துங்க சாது ஜன மோடு கூடி
பொங்கு ஞான அரு ளங்க வாரி யாடி
அங்கமே பரவ சங் கொளப் பலப
தங்களோடு சுப மங்களங்கள் சொலி—எக்காலமும்......

பழுதிலாது தினம் முழுதும் உன்னை நாடி
தொழுது நேசமுடன் அழுதுபாடி ஆடி
ஒழுகு செந்தழலின் மெழுகு போல மனம்
இளகியே அதிக புளகிதாங்க முடன்—எக்காலமும்......

He asks pardon for his sins in the name of humanity in the following song:

நேயனைப் போல் விவகரிப்பேன்—துதிகவிகள்
ஆயிரம் உண் டாக்கி விரிப்பேன்—என்செய்கையெல்லாம்
வாயின் அன்பலாது மனம் தோயும் அன்புளதோ சிறு
நாயின் அன்புமே இல்லாமல் தீய வம்பனுய்த் திரியும்
என் பிழைகள் பொறுத்தருள்வாய் எனை—அலைக்கும்
துன்ப வினை அறுத்தருள்வாய்.

His search for God finds its expression in the following beautiful hymn:

ஏனின்னம் தாமதம் ஐயா
என்னிடம் வர.

தானே உமக்குமுத்தித் தலமொன்று நிலையோ
வானமுத்தரைவிட்டு வரமனமிலையோ
சூரியனைத் தூண்ட அகன்றீரோ—அந்தச்
சோமனுக் கொளிதரச் சென்றீரோ
பாரினைப் புரட்டியே நின்றீரோ—அதில்
பகல் இரவுண்டாக்க முயன்றீரோ

காரிலிருந்து கனமழை சொரிந்தீரோ
கர்ப்பத்தில் சிசுக்களையே புரிந்தீரோ
சாரும் பல்லுயிர்க் குயிராய் விரிந்தீரோ
சர்வலோககாரியஞ் செய்து திரிந்தீரோ—எனின்...

அண்டகோடிகளைத் தூக்கினீரோ—நவம
ஆகச் சில அண்டம் ஆக்கினீரோ
கண்டகர் உலகை நீக்கினீரோ—கடல்
கரையைக் கடவாமல் தேக்கினீரோ

அண்டும் பல்லுயிர்க்கமு தூட்டுகின்றீரோ
ஐம்பூதங்கட்கும் வேலை காட்டுகின்றீரோ
மண்டுங்கனிக்குச் சுவை கூட்டுகின்றீரோ
மலருக்குப் பலவண்ணந் தீட்டுகின்றீரோ—ஏனின்

Vedanayagar was first and foremost a Catholic Christian bhakta. And it was the riches of this experience that he gifted to Tamil culture. The special traits of his which we have analysed give a peculiar flavour even to his typically Catholic hymns which have a certain allurement for bhaktas of all faiths. For example his Sattiya Veda Keerthanaigal starts with the hymn in Todi Raga:

தள்ளத் தள்ளப் பாசி தண்ணீரை மூடுதல் போலே—ஜெக
ஜால வினை எனை மேலும் மேலும் தொடலாலே
உள்ளத் துயர்கொண்டுருகினேன் இம்மானுவேலே—எனக்கு
உன்னையல்லால் கதி பின்னை யுண்டோ புவிமேலே
எள்ளத்தனையும் நீ இரங்காதிருந்திடல்
ஏனோ கெடு வேனோ படு வேனோ விடு வேனோ—உனை
ஆதிபரன் திருச்சுதனே

Or the last hymn for the car festival of the Virgin Mary in Gambhoji Raga:

சுரரும் பரரும் பரவும் பரமன்
சுகுணம் புவனம் பெற வந் தருளும்
சூல் உதரத்தி—உரத்தி
சீல விரக்தி—வரத்தி
சுத்த சித்த உத்தமத்தர்—மொய்த்தடுத்த பாரிலே
கொத்து ரத்னம் வைத்திழைத்த சித்ரமணித் தேரிலே

மாமரி அன்னை வந்தாள் உலகும் வானும்
மகிழ்ந்திடக் காட்சி தந்தாள்.

In 1873, the year of his retirement from the Judiciary, came out his Catholic hymns and psalms: Tiru Arul Malai, Tiru Arul Antathi, Deva Mada Antathi and Periya Nayagi Amman Padigam. The following stanza is a sample from Tiru Arul Malai:

சிறந்த நினது செபமாலை தூக்கிச் செபிக்கப் புகில்
பிறந்த தினம் முதல் கண்டவை கேட்டவை பின்னும் முன்னே
மறந்தவை யாவும் நினைப்பேன் நின் பாதம் மனனம் செய்யேன்
அறந்தழுவும் பொருளே என் செபத்தை நன்று ஆக்கிக் கொள்ளே.

தங்கச் சரட்டில் புனையும் சிலுவை தரிசிப்பதும்
வங்கச் சரட்டில் புனை செபமாலை கைவைப்பதுவும்
அங்கச் சரடுறு பொன்னுக்கும் வெள்ளிக்கும் ஆசை அல்லால்
துங்கச் சுயம் பொருளே உன் ஆசைத்தொடர்பு அல்லவே!

இடையில் சரிகை உடையும் முண்டாசும் எழில் அங்கியும்
உடைய அணிகளும் மற்றோர்க்குக் காட்டவும் உற்றிடுவோர்
நடை உடை யாவையும் காணவும் கோயிற்கு நண்ணல் அன்றித்
தடையற நின்னைத் தொழும் பொருட்டு அன்று தயாநிதியே.

And in 1889 his Deva Thothira Malai was published. It was not exactly his swan song before laying down his tools for ever and flying on July 21st to the eternal embrace of the Veda Nayagan whom he had worshipped, sung and served all his life. Deva Thothira Malai indeed sounds like the echoes of his daily meditations for many long years of his chequered career vibrant with his varying experiences. But the stanzas are gems of Tamil poetry by any standard, in perfect consonance with the best Tamil tradition. Look at the psalmist's boldness in chiding his Lord in the following stanza:

ஆற்றில் விழுந்து அழுவோரைக் கைதூக்கி அவர் துயரம்
மாற்றிவிடாரை அடாமல் விடுவைகொல்? மாயவினைச்
சேற்றில் விழுந்து திகைப்பேனை நீ கண்டு தேற்றிக்கரை
ஏற்றிவிடாமல் இருப்பது அழகல்ல என் ஐயனே! (78)

Or in the style of self-reproach of a Manickavacagar,

காரக மின்னலை நீரக மொக்குளைக் கானலை நேர்
பாரக வாழ்வை நிலையென எண்ணிப் பறவை என
ஊரக மெங்கணுமே அலைந்தோடி உலையு நெஞ்சே
மாரகமேவும் உன் தாரக நாதனை வாழ்த்துவையே (83)

Thus the soul is advised to interiorize and find its Lord and Spouse in the cave of the heart.

"What profit bring the songs that we but vainly make and sing Except the ones that hymn Thy praise, O Heaven's rightful king. A waste of writing paper, ink and every other thing And waste of tongue's fine energy, from which no goodwill spring." So renders in English Mr. G. J. B. Christopher stanza 21:

வீட்டுக்குரிய அரசே! உன் மீதன்றி வீணிற் செய்யும்
பாட்டுக்கு உறும் பயன் என்னைகொலோ? அந்தப் பாட்டெழுதும்
ஏட்டுக்குச் சேதம் இறகுக்குச் சேதம் எழுதுவார் கைந்
நாட்டுக்குச் சேதம் சொல் நாவுக்குச் சேதம் ஓர் நன்மை இன்றே!

He is the Indweller of the cave of my heart. My soul is his house. It is therefore His business to keep it tidy, clean and interiorly decorated:

பொன்னாலயங் கட்டப் பூதம் குடிவந்து புக்கது போல்
நின்னாலயமெனக் கட்டி வைத்திட்ட என் நெஞ்சகத்தைத்
தன் ஆலயமென வாழ் மாயைதன்னைத் தடிந்து அகற்றி
உன் ஆலயந்தனில் நீ சுகமாக உறை பரனே.

And in the last of the 110 stanzas he renders up his soul to the Lord who made it to fulfil in it His own eternal purpose.

என்றும் நிலைபெற மேலோர் இதயத்(து)எழும் சுடரே
ஒன்றுமிலாச் சுத்த சூனியமாகி ஒழிந்த எனை
அன்றுருவாக்கிய விண் அமரும் முத்தன் ஆக்கவன்ரோ
நன்று உன் மனோரதம் பூரணமாம்படி நன்மை செயே.

என் நெஞ்சம் என்பது கன்னெஞ்சமே, எளியேனும் இந்த
வன் நெஞ்சம் கொண்டெத்தனை நாள் வருந்தி மயங்குவன்? நீ
இன் நெஞ்சந்தன்னை எடுத்துக்கொண்டாயினும் எற்கு இனி ஓர்
நன் நெஞ்சந்தன்னை உதவிடல் வேண்டும் விண் நாயகனே.

தானேறிய பரி தாழ்குழி தள்ளிய தன்மை ஒத்தே
நான் ஏறிய நெஞ்சப் பாய்மா எனக்கு அடங்காது எழுந்து
வானேறி உச்ச மலையேறி மெய்க் கடிவாளம் கொய்து
கானேறித் துன்பக் கடல் எனை வீழ்த்தது காண் பரனே.

வன்பு ஒன்று பாழ் மனமே என் சொல் கேட்டி, இம் மண்ணும் விண்ணும்
என்பு ஒன்று தேகம் உயிர்முதல் யாவையும் ஈந்தவர் நம்
அன்பு ஒன்று வேட்டனர் வேறொன்றும் வேட்கிலர், அன்பு உளேபேல்
இன்பு ஒன்று பூரண வாழ்வும் அருள்வர் இது நிசமே.

We should end this all too brief study of this great son of Tamil Nadu with the same yearning as that of Miss Mary Masilamony that the Tamil and Christian communities appreciate and be benefited by such devout and literary creations of Vedanayagam Pillai; that day will indeed be the good day for both Tamil and for Christianity.

Along with Vedanayagam Pillai we must mention his friend and poet from Karaikal, Savarayalu Nayagar. A typical stanza of Vedanayagar gives us a good idea of the inter-religious openness of both, and how steeped these two were in Hindu culture while living a fully committed Christian life. Vedanayagar writes: "Adisesha has got a thousand tongues but has not sung a single Tamil verse. You with only one tongue have so many sweet songs. Adisesha's two thousand ears are ears that hear not. Your two ears are rich with a wealth of learning. Adisesha's mouth secretes poison. Yours wells up with mellifluous Tamil. You bear the holy name of the great Saint Xavier. You have the great grace of being the disciple of the incomparable guru Meenakshisundaram Pillai of Tiruchirapalli. The grand theme of your song is the transcendent beauty of the Ultimate Reality. What then can be lacking in your poetry?"

Or again in a more devout strain he sings:

கலையழகை உணர் சவராயலு நாயகா! மரிய கன்னித் தாயின்
தலையழகை மீன் காட்டும்; தாள் அழகை சசிகாட்டும்; தங்க மேனி
மலையழகைக் கதிர் காட்டும்; குண அழகை மறை காட்டும்; மாண்பால்
[இத்தாய்
நிலையழகைப் பல கவியால் நீ காட்டல் அதிசயமோ நிலத்தில் தானே?

'Savarayalu full of aesthetic taste and art, the stars declare the beauty of the Virgin Mother; the moon declares the loveliness of her feet; the sun shows forth the golden hill of her form; the Vedas reveal her entrancing inner traits. What wonder in the world that you are able to pour out numerous lovely verses describing this paragon of created beauty?"

Savarayalu Nayagar was born in Pondicherry in 1829 three years after Vedanayagar. Poetry was in his blood. But he had

no initiation into Tamil. Who will explain to him Beschi's Thembavani and Thirukkavalur Kalambagam? No less a person than Tiruchi Meenakshisundaram Pillai. Off he went to place himself at the feet of this great master. Mahamahopadyaya U. V. Swaminatha Iyer describes how the master received the pupil, first taught him the preliminaries and then went with him through Thembavani and Tirukkavalur Kalambagam.

The Catholic pupil Savarayalu was second to none in his bhakti to his Hindu guru. He never began his discourses on Thembavani or Thirukkavalur Kalambagam—which he gave often in various places—without invoking the grace of his guru first:

ஓதுதற்கு அருநூல் யாவையும் உணர்ந்த
உணர்வினன் திரிசிர கிரியான்
மேதகு பதியில் ஒளிதரு ஞான
விளக்கமாய் அடியவர் உளத்தில்
தீதுறும் அவிச்சையாம் இருள் தீர்த்துத்
திகழும் என் தேசிகனாய
கோதின் மீனாட்சி சுந்தரன் அருளால்
கூறுதும் இஃது உளம் துணிந்தே.

And his guru returned his affection in abundant measure and composed a Savarayalu Malai in his praise, just as he composed Kulattur Kovai in honour of Vedanayagar.

Vedanayagam Pillai introduced H. A. Krishna Pillai to Mēenakshisundaram Pillai. Thus love of Tamil was the bond of intimate union between Hindus, Protestants and Catholics.

Savarayalu Nayagar's songs include bhakti hymns. On the Virgin Mother he sang Perinba Satakam, Perinba Antathi, Divya Manmiyam, Jebamalai Matha Manmiyam, and Tirunavasatakam. On St. Joseph he composed a Tevaram. He also served the cause of Tamil music by collecting an anthology of Christian hymns, called Deva Thothira. Sangeetha Keertanam. His expository lectures on Thembavani begins with

விளங்குறு வெண்புகழ் வணையும் மீனாட்சி சுந்தரப் பேர்க்
களங்கமில் தேசிகன் என்பால் கருணைநனி புரிந்ததனால்
துளங்குறு தேம்பா வணிக்குச் சொலத் துணிந்தேன் உரைவிரித்து
வளங்கெழு அவ்வருள் இலையேல் வழுத்தலரிது அரிது அரிதே.

An example from Savarayulu Nayagar's Tevaram in honour of St. Joseph :

மாதவர் ஏறே போற்றி மாமரி துணைவா போற்றி
வேதியர்க் கொளியே போற்றி மென்மலர்க் கொடியே போற்றி
நீதமார் புனிதா போற்றி நின்மலர்க் கொழுந்தே போற்றி
நாதனுக் கினியாய் போற்றி நற்சூசை முனியே போற்றி.

While some other village poets were given to alcoholism, Savarayulu saw the evil of drunkenness around him and asked why the Government which took steps to curb all the other evils was indifferent to this "mother of all evils." Is it because of the revenue from this evil habit, he asks.

கொடியரையும் கொலையரையும் திருடரையும்
    பொய்யரையும் கொடுஞ்சூதாடும்
கயவரையும் துன்மார்க்கக் காரரையும்
    தண்டித்துக் காக்கும் மன்னர்
படியில்இவர் களுக்கெல்லாம் தாயாம்சா
    ராயம்மது பானஞ்செய்யும்
குடியர்களைத் தண்டிக்கா தேன்விடுத்தார்
    பணம்இவரால் குவியுதன்றோ?

Another Catholic savant connecting last century with ours was Pandit Savariroya Pillai. He was born in Vadakankulam in Tirunelveli Dt. in 1859. He too was a self-made man who began as a teacher in an elementary school in Tuticorin and rose up to be the Tamil Pandit in St. Joseph's College in Tiruchirapalli in 1894. He composed a drama of St. Alexis. He has called it Sri Paharta Vilasam. It gives the life of St. Alexis whom the Roman martyrology qualified as a saint who "deceived the world by a new device." The drama consists of 3 ilambagams.

Pandit Savariroya Pillai acquired by himself a knowledge of Latin, English and Sanskrit in addition to his great erudition in

Tamil. In 1872 the Government of India started "The Indian Antiquary", a journal of oriental research in archaeology, history, literature, languages, folklore etc. etc., its first editor being Jas Burgess. It is an all India research journal. And Tamil scholars felt that Tamil research did not find equitable space in it. A Tamil archaeological society was formed in Tiruchirapalli with Savariroyan as the honorary secretary and started publishing a periodical, The Tamilian Antiquary. Pandit Savariroyan in addition to his editorials contributed research papers on the Dravidian problem. He shows his vast erudition in these. He discussed all the opinions about the origin of Dravidians. He controverted the theory of Dr. Caldwell that the Dravidians were related to the Scythians group of the Turanians (Mangoloid family). He argued with Prof. Vincon and others that the Dravidians of South India belong to the Caucasian melanochroid physical type allied to the Indo-Eruopean and differs altogether from the Mongoloid and Negroid types. It is another Elamite race. Savariroyan also suggested that the Ophir of the Old Testament (I Kings ch. 9:27, 28 and Psalm 44 / 45) comes from Ovari (உவரி) the sea port of the Pandyan kings whose capital was Korkai. A galaxy of eminent scholars have contributed to this Tamilian Antiquary.

Arulappa Navalar of Jaffna called also Boologasinga Mudaliar, composed an epic entitled Tiruccelvarasar Kavyam. It was published in 1896. It narrates the life of a Saivite convert to Christianity. A few padalams like Tharka Sastra Padalam are fully commented on. It is of the standard of puranas. A few stanzas have an easy flow and can be made use of for prayer e.g. the first:

ஆதி ஈறில்லான் நன்மை ஆனந்தன் அமலன் ஞானச்
சோதியான் அனைத்தும் வல்லன் சுருதியான் தூயன் தொல்லோன்
நீதியான் நிலமும் வானும் நிலவும் எப்பொருளும் தந்த
தாதையாம் நாதன் தாளைத் தலைமிசைப் போற்றித் தாழ்வாம்

We must not omit mentioning the great service to Tamil done by Fr. S. Gnanaprakasar OMI of Nallur, Jaffna. A very busy parish priest with spiritual and administrative care of thousands of people, he found time to write several books and tracts, where his research in various fields inculding Saiva Siddhanta is

admirable. But the incomparable gift he made to Tamil was "An Etymological and Comparative Lexicon of the Tamil Language, with Indexes of Words Quoted from Indo-European Languages." It is an invaluable contribution to Comparative Philology. His Philological Introduction to this Lexicon explains in the first section eight laws that govern the changes which a word-type or root and its derived forms undergo and the second section explains phonetic transformations and section three Semantic changes. As a linguistic hobby of a busy parish priest this appears astounding if not miraculous. It can be compared only to the language and astronomical hobbies of L. D. Swamikkannu Pillai of Madras. It is a great loss to Tamil that death overtook Fr. Gnanaprakasar when the Lexicon had reached in Vol. I Part VI the word Ēṛiyāl.

Fr. Dr. H. S. David of Jaffna is continning the work of Gnanaprakasar and has published the Volume II Part I to IV of An Etymological and Comparative Lexicon of the Tamil Language. But his work is too elaborate a linguistic analysis and lacks the ready referability of a Lexicon which Gnanaprakasar's work possesses eminently.

Pandit Savariroya Pillai's brother, Dr. C. D. Nallathambi Pillai also has contributed to Tamil studies and poetry. The editor of the monthly Sathiya Nesan did great service to Tamil by encouraging Tamil Pandits of our schools and colleges to publish in its pages their poetic and prose literature. Mr. D. Kulandaisamy Pillai's novel in two volumes called Karumkuyil Kunrathukkolai, to which was added a third volume by his son-in-law, was a very entertaining and elevating detective story with moving characterization. It has been produced as a film called Maragadam. Rev. Fr. Santiago S. J. gave us a semi-historical novel adapting Cardinal Wiseman's Fabiola calling it by the hero's name Pancras. That book along with another of its kind called "The Lily and the Rose" deal with the legends connected with Christian martyrs of the first centuries. They provided educative entertainment to Christian families for decades.

"Devasagaya Mani Malai" is a poetic narration of the martyrdom of Devasagayam Pillai on Karradi Malai near Aralvay-

mozhi in Nagercoil region. It took place in 1752 as it is mentioned in the only edition of 1916, p, 54:

அறஞ் சிறந்த மாதவனும் இறந்த நாளோ
அகிலமதில் சேசுபரன் அவதரித்துப்
பிறந்த பதினேழ் நூற் றைம்பத்தி ரண்டில்
பேசரிய தை மதி ஈரேழு தேதி
நிறமுடைய நாள் வெள்ளிக்கிழமை கங்குல்
நிகழ்த்தரிய சேசுபரன் சாயலாகத்
திறமுடைய காயம் ஐந்து பட்டு இறந்து
திகழ் வேதசாட்சி முடி சிரமேற் பூண்டார். (280)

Along with such writings we must mention the folk songsters of Christian villages who conduct Katha Kalakshepams, Villuppattu, Kolattam, and Kummi and also compose hymns to be sung in Sacred Services.

Thiru T. M. Ayyadurai Bhagavathar of Kayathar was one such well known songster and story - telling minstrel. His Sathiya Veda Sangeerthanam and a few other publications are in our hands. Thiru S. Selvaraju Reddiyar's Sesunathar Ammanai as well as his stories in prose were published in the twenties.

There are also heaps of unpublished manuscripts of our Annaviyars. Some samples may give an idea how these unlettered poets sometimes hit a high level of experience reminding us of the Kural of Thiru V. Ka.:

என்னுள்ளே நீ பிறந்தாய் ஏசு பெருமானே
உன்னுள்ளே யான் இறந்தேன் உற்று.

Hanumanthampatti nestles amidst rich paddy fields and groves fed by the Suruli river which meanders and flows into the Vaigai. In this idyllic place in 1863 was born Anthonimuthu Pillai. He seems to have read Tamil literature with the help of Sri Srinivasa Aiyyangar of that place. But the latter is reported to have confessed that the Tamil Muse did not favour him as she did Anthonimuthu. Anthonimuthu Pillai composed songs for many a village drama. But his great work is Rakshanya Sindu.

ஜெயவிக் கருணை தரு மரிநற் சுதனுடைய
திரு ரட்சணிய சிந்து பாடவே—பல
வெறுஞ் சிற்றின்பக் கவிகள் வாடவே.

He expresses his purpose in the following stanza:

விமலத் தமிழெனுஞ் சொல் லமிர்தக் கடல் படிந்த
விநயக் கவி சிறந்த நாவலன்—வள
மிகும் இத்தலியில் வந்த பாவலன்—குரு
வீரமாமுனி ஓது மாவள நூலிலே சில காதையானவை
விரவப் பகர்வன் இந்த வேலையே—புகழ்
தெரிதற் குரிய சிந்திலேயே

This villager's tender devotion to the Virgin Mary and his love for Tamil, both shine forth in the following:

அமைபொற் சிரணவிம்ப மகுடத்தரசர் தங்கள்
அருமைப் புதல்வியென்று வந்தவள்—எனக்கு
அமிர்தத் தமிழை இன்று தந்தவள்—திகழ்
ஆதமோடு உலகானதே முதல் யாவுமாகுமுன் ஆதி
[காலேயில்
அமலக் கடவுள் சிந்தை நின்றவள்—பின்னர்
அவனைக் கருவமைத்துக் கொண்டவள்.

This reminds us of the immortal lines of Beschi:

உருவிலான் உருவாகி உலகிலொரு மகவுதிப்பக்
கருவிலாக் கருத்தாங்கிக் கன்னித்தா யாயினையே.

These village poets have a virgin mind that soaks in the beauty of nature that surrounds them. Anthonimuthu describes Palestine thus:

மாசிலாத நீளருவி மோதி அலே வீசுதொறும்
வண்ணமணி முத்தினங்கள் பொங்குமே—அவை
வெண்ணிலாக் கிரணமதில் தங்குமே—அந்த
வான் நிலம் பல மீன் இனங்கொடு தான் இறங்கினதோ எனும்படி
மாமலர் பூத்திடும் விநோதமே—மிக
வாசனை வீசும் ஒரு காதமே...........
விண் தொடர்ந்து இடம் படர்ந்து இலங்கிடும் கருங்குவட்டில்
மிஞ்சிய கருமுகில் சஞ்சரிக்குமே—அதை
குஞ்சரம் இனமென் றுபச ரிக்குமே!

Marutham, Mullai and Kurinji are playing hand in hand in the Kombai valley. The poet imagines also Palai when he meditates the Holy Family's flight into Egypt:

"ஆணவத்தின் மாயை வென்றார்—பதம்
ஐயோ நோக நடக்கின்றார்—தவ
அழகுள்ளோருக்கு இது தகுமோ வென்று கிளி
அறையும்—தும்பி இரையும்."

In addition to this Rakshanya Sindu there are in manuscripts some 125 bhakti hymns from the hand of this village poet. Isthakkiyar (St. Eustachius) Natakam, Devasagayam Pillai Natakam, the Attidayan (Shepherd) Natakam have been composed by him to be staged by the villagers. Plague Sindu, Kali Yuga Sindu etc. etc., were also produced by him as the time and events urged him to sing. Here is one hymn that is infectious in its great hope and serenity:

பீடு நமக்குண்டு; பாலனிடம் மனுப் பேச மரி
ஈடு நமக்குண்டு; கேட்டவரம் பெற ஏசுபரன்
பாடு நமக்குண்டு பாவத்தைப் போக்க; இப் பார் விட்டபின்
வீடு நமக்குண்டு; இதை விட வேறென்ன வேண்டும் நெஞ்சே?

வேத நமக்குண்டு ஒரு வழிகாட்ட; விமல சற்ப்ர
சாத நமக்குண்டு மற்று நாம் உய்யத் தனிப் பரமன்
பாத நமக்குண்டு நாளு மலைவுறும் பாவி நெஞ்சே
சேத நமக்கேது பின்னர் வரு நடுத் தீர்வையிலே?

Take a sample of the extreme south. Azhagappapuram in Kanyakumari District. An illiterate poet eking out his livelihood by breaking stones on the roadside or ploughing the fields, called Maria Michael, gets his inspiration on Christmas night and sings out his deep theology: எங்கும் நிறைந்த பாலன் பிறந்தார்.

உலகாதி காரணனா யோங்கு பிதாவோ டெதிர்ந்தே
இலகாதி நால்வரமும் இழந்து நரகடைந்த
அலகையும் அவை கொண்ட ஆண்மை யெலாம் அடங்க
விலகு கனி விஷம் ஓர் கன்னி பக்கத்தில் ஒடுங்க
விண்ணுல கென்ன இந்த மண்ணும் மிகத் துலங்க
எங்கும் நிறைந்த பாலன் பிறந்தார்.

I must mention also the spontaneous outpourings of the Khani hill tribes near Courtalam and Papanasam waterfalls. Their picturesque description of the minutest flowers on their slopes and their natural history come out in their Kolattam and Kummi songs. The snakes with which they have to negotiate for their lives have given rise to Pambukkolattam. These songs also have been used to communicate Christ's message and salvation. Spending a few nights amidst them on the slopes of those hills might give us a new lease of life.

Dr. Rajamanickam S. J. after giving a list of authors who have written on Christian contribution to Tamil quotes what the late Mr. Sargunar, Professor of Tamil in Madras Christian College wrote in his preface to Mayilai Cini Venkatasami's 'Kristavamum Tamizhum': "Now, even if Europeans have not done anything but try thus to open our eyes to the excellence of our language, and warn us against neglecting it, we must be extremely indebted to them. But they have done more: They simplified the Tamil script. They introduced space between the words, simple or compound, of a sentence, for it had been the native custom to write a whole sentence as if it were composed of one long word. They were the first to print Tamil tracts, books, and papers. They were the first to introduce the study of Tamil into the civilised countries of the world. They were the first to make Tamil translations from European languages. They were the first to compile Tamil word-books, dictionaries, and lexicons, which made obsolete the time honoured custom of memorising the metrical Tamil vocabularies, before taking up literature. They were the first to write Tamil treatises on Natural Science. They were the first to urge educated Tamils to bring out expurgated editions of Tamil works, and to write interesting general literature of a wholesome character. They were the first to show us how to make a critical study of our language, literature and grammar. And they were the first not only to teach us that 'that is not good language that all understand not', and that there can be no social, moral, religious, political, or economic progress among a people who have no homely prose literature to read, but also taught us to write 'modern Tamil prose', and created the reading habit among

us." In this lecture we have pointed out that not only Europeans but also Christian Tamilians have contributed to Tamil.

East—West Dialogue in Music

Now Tamil language is the backbone of Tamil culture. But Tamil music and the other Fine Arts also make up Tamil culture. What has Christianity contributed to Tamil culture in these areas?

Comparable with Abraham Pandithar among the Protestant Christians with his monumental work Karunamrta Sagaram, we have among Catholics Mr. A. M. Chinnaswami Mudaliar. Having taken a degree of Master of Arts in the Madras University, he served as the Superintendent of the Madras Secretariat. He devoted all his leisure to the study of music, Western and Oriental and to comparative musicology. He learnt the compositions of Thyagarajayya from Umayalpuram Krishna Bhagavathar and Sundara Bhagavathar who were the direct disciples of that luminary of the first magnitude in the musical firmament of South India in modern times. He dedicated all his savings to the publication of his Magnum Opus: Oriental Music in Western Notation. He asks and answers "why Europeans dislike Oriental music" and "why Orientals fail to appreciate Western Music". (cf. Introduction IX and X). He points out the peculiarities in European Music (cf. XI) and the peculiarities of Oriental Music (cf. XII). His survey of the 72 Melakartas seems to have supplied the model for more recent publications. He explains the special advantages of the European Staff Notation (cf. VI), and points out improvements to be effected in it and pleads that the co-operation of Eastern and Western nations are absolutely necessary. "It is of the highest importance", he wrote, "that the influential members of the Royal Academy of Music in England, the Conservatoire de la Musique in France and similar institutions in other countries should unite together and establish with the concurrence of the most eminent Musicians of the day a different symbol for each kind of grace or ornament which can then be uniformly adopted by all the nations of the world." He pointed out (cf. XIV) the effects producible by the combination of Western and Eastern systems. Twenty years after he wrote these lines Fr. Hull S. J.,

an Englishman, Editor of the Examiner in Bombay, wrote a series of articles in the same line of thought.

In Section XVIII of the Introduction Chinnaswami Mudaliar chalks out the grand programme he has set for himself in his monthly Oriental Music in Western Notation:

I. A monthly periodical...containing every description of the Music of India from the most classical and difficult styles to the commonest descriptions of popular reels and jigs; the Music to be in European staff Notation.

II. A companion volume of instructions explaining in the simplest possible language both European and Indian Musical systems including Nātha Sāstra, Rāgadhyāya, Tālādhyāya, Svarajatis, Tānas, Varnas, Pallavis and so forth.

III. An Elementary Exercise Book containing Sarali Varusas, Alankāras, Lakshana Gitas.

This marvellous introduction is followed by about 80 Kritis of Thyagarajayya fully exposed in Staff Notation. I have heard these played on the violin by two old Indian Jesuit priests who played them by sight, and held me enraptured. An Index contains about 400 entries of Thyagarajayya and 51 for which music is said to be not traceable.

The work exposes also Arunachala Kavirayar's Ramayana Padam, Miscellaneous songs of Muthuswami Dikshitar, the Kirtanas of Gopala Krishna Bharathi, the compositions of Subarama Dikshita and the Lakshana Gita of Venkatamahi. Mudaliar started also dealing at great length with the physiognomic and aesthetic peculiarities of the Ragas. He has given only Atthana Raga with full Sarali Varusa, Sapta Tala Alankaras and Lakshana Gitas.

A reviewer of this monumental work of Chinnaswami Mudaliar in the Indian Antiquary, Oct. 1895, p. 304 categorically said that "the European ear, with its previous training by the European scales and divisions of the octave is not likely to appreciate the Oriental scales and divisions." And Mudaliar's footnote commented a la Pondicherry "Tant pis pour eux." When the reviewer said

"on the keyed instruments as at present tuned it is not possible to render oriental music correctly or to describe it in European Notation", Mudaliar's footnote was forthright: "This is a complete hallucination. Nothing but want of skill and patience combined with prejudice on the part of European musicians has led to this fatal error." Time has justified Mudaliar. The West has opened its ears to Oriental music. Only the Christian community in Tamil Nadu has not yet done so, at least to a great extent.

Chinnaswami Mudaliar demonstrated in the pentatonic scales with the help of double sharps and double flats that he could expose correctly and visually the intricacies of the thousand and more janya ragas, giving also the parallels in the Ecclesiastical modes of the Middle Ages. With the help of semi, semi-demi and semi-demi-hemi quavers he demonstrated visually the intricacies of the Oriental and Tamil Tālas. He wanted trillo symbols for various kinds of shakes or gamagas (cf. VII). Then he studied the styles of the great masters, the Ashtapadi hymns of Jayadeva, Kritis of Purandara Das, the Lakshana Gitas of Govinda Dikshit.

The Madras Mail, 16th September 1896, quoting an article in the Musical Times wished that A. M. Chinnaswami Mudaliar would soon be able to prove in his own case the truth of the dictum that "A Prophet is not without honour save in his own country". This eulogy evoked from the genius of Chinnaswami Mudaliar a lovely prayer of four long paragraphs in Latin(!!), the first para beginning with "Domine non sum dignus......" and the following paragraph addressed to the Virgin Mary: "Tu quoque sola es Mater Universitatis (Lōka Mādā)...quam invocabant variis nuncupationibus, variis figuris...Athenam Hellenes, Minervam Quirites, Sarasvatiam nostrates...."

Professor Sambamoorthi wrote in 1952 that unpublished manuscripts of songs in staff notation were still with his relatives in Pondicherry. We do not know in what state they are while his published Magnum Opus itself is crumbling into dust, without any agency coming forward to republish them. I feel like applying to Chinnaswami Mudaliar every word of what Prof. Thomas Srinivasan wrote concluding his study of Veeramamunivar (given above in Lecture II).

Architecture and Iconography

When Erama Chetti, the Governor of Madurai, permitted Nobili to build his Mutt and Church with brick and morter, de Nobili built his chapel in Indian style. Beschi installed in Konan Kuppam the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary executed according to the requirements of Indian iconography like a Tamil Queen and named her Periya Nayagi Ammai. One of the pioneer missionaries of the restored Society of Jesus built a Church at East Gate in Madurai. Being in the vicinity of the temple and the Mahal of Tirumalai Nayak, the two towers of the Church as well as their cupolic crown were in agreement with the architecture around. That was in the middle of the 19th century. In 1910 one missionary added a large sanctuary and side naves to this Church. It was flawless in engineering but an abominable apology of Gothic architecture. The combination was an eye sore. In a recent attempt at renewing this Church the front portion which was a century old was pulled down and the front of the church built in agreement with the rear and the whole incongruity is squatting low on the sand. In the twenties of this century Fr. Heras of Bombay was touring India pleading for churches in Indian style. Near Nagercoil in three villages churches have been built according to the suggestions and models left by Fr. Heras. And the local population Catholic and non-Catholic are proud of these structures. In compensation for these few churches in Indian architecture, hundreds of chapels and churches are being put up which can very well sit pretty in Boston, Berlin or Birmingham.

Conclusion

In our first two lectures we have seen that the Christian contribution to Tamil culture was given by the missionaries of the Society of Jesus like Fr. Robert de Nobili. This could not be helped since the members of the other religious orders and the diocesan clergy were either falling in line with the Jesuits or were violently opposing their move. In the third lecture we have scarcely mentioned any Jesuit contribution. What is the cause for this absence? First, during the period of the suppression of the Society, the sphere of mutual influence of Christianity and Indian culture had shifted from Tamil Nadu to Bengal.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy who was the father of Brahmo Samaj belonged to that period. Christianity had affected Hinduism very deeply. But it gave rise to unfortunate controversies between the Christian missionaries, Protestant and Catholic on the one hand and the Brahmo Samajists on the other. Secondly, the British had emerged victorious over their French rivals and a multitude of Indian contenders and they had established their Raj. And three years before the French Jesuits of the restored Society arrived in Tamil Nadu, English education had been introduced. There were other great handicaps for the new missionaries to overcome. They had to reorganize their parochial work, start educational institutions which were much in demand and encourage various religious congregations of men and women to be started for educational and social and charitable works. A pamphlet in 1938 surveying the 100 years of this new mission is titled "Stranger than fiction". The statistics of growth of the various institutions justify the tittle. But in the area of contribution to Tamil and Tamil culture, there is practically nothing to show. Even this pamphlet while narrating the work of the great missionary Fr. Trincāl S. J. does not mention – it is very strange – the great work he accomplished by publishing the whole Bible in Tamil. This version was in use till our recent (1971) new translation came out. Certain periodicals were published but there was very little of contribution to Tamil culture. Some of these missionaries seem to have even believed that Tamil language would be dead in the near future.

A Tamil hymn book printed in 1923 contains over 200 hymns practically all set to French tunes composed by a couple of dozens of French composers like Gounod and Lambillote with Tamil words thrust into these tunes. Some of them are real howlers of the language. These hymns were sung lustily in several voices and with counterpoints. The youth thus intoxicated developed a western taste and a bluntness and insensitivity to the requirements of Tamil idiom. Thus though Tamil Catholics are more Indian in their way of dressing and eating and other areas of behaviour, if not in their superstitions than the Catholics of Bombay, Goa, Mangalore etc., they were westernised in taste and

ways of thought. This prevails on the Fishery Coast but is not uncommon in the interior. Certain districts however kept up the Tamil traditions as popularised by Vedanayagam Pillai, Fr. Santiago S. J. and other hymnists.

In thought patterns, against the background of the Brahmo Samaj in Bengal came the famous convert Swami Brahmabandab Upadhyay, Animananda and others. The Belgian Sanskrit Scholars Fr. Johanns S. J., and Fr. Dandoy S. J. started "The Light of the East" in 1922. Fr. Heras from Bombay began his peaceful propaganda for Indianisation. But the French Jesuits of Tamil Nadu by and large took an antagonistic attitude to this movement. They republished certain of de Nobili's works omitting the aspect of the Third and Fourth Foundations we have mentioned in the first lecture. Thus even the educated lay Catholics were divided into two camps, one upholding Adaptation, Accommodation, Acculturation and the present word Inculturation, and the opposite group rejecting it as Hinduisation etc.

In the meanwhile the Church's attitude to world religions has undergone a definite change and has been formulated in Vatican II in an unvacillating manner. But a good portion of the Tamil Nadu Catholic clergy and laity and the leadership seem fossilised in the old no-innovation attitude. The feudal mentality dies hard even when the feudal system itself is as dead as mutton. The paternal providence of the Pannaiyar mentality must yield to the law of subsidiarity and the belief in the local Church of the worshipping community. A post-Vatican II reform and renewal of the Church seems to be a sine-qua-non so that the Church in Tamil Nadu may be true to herself and her ancient history and contribute the abundance of her rich experience towards the growth and development of Tamil culture.

Without abdicating her prophetic role of judging and proclaiming, without abandoning her role of catalyst of cultural growth and social transformation, she has yet to be true to her inner dynamism to incarnate herself in the local culture thus revitalising and resurrecting Tamil society and Tamil culture. The Church faces here her modern chance and challenge. It is our prayer that the Church

leadership will measure up to the expectation, that the clergy and laity will see clearly the signs of the times and thus prove themselves loyal to their universal faith and their ancient glorious heritage of Tamil culture.

Let me conclude this lecture by repeating a remark which Christopher Dawson made at the end of his well-known book on "Religion and the Rise of Western Culture"; he writes: "If there is any truth in what I have been saying........., such moments of vital fusion between a living religion and a living culture are the creative events in history, in comparison with which all the external achievements in the political and economic order are transitory and insignificant."

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